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By GEOFF St. REYNARD

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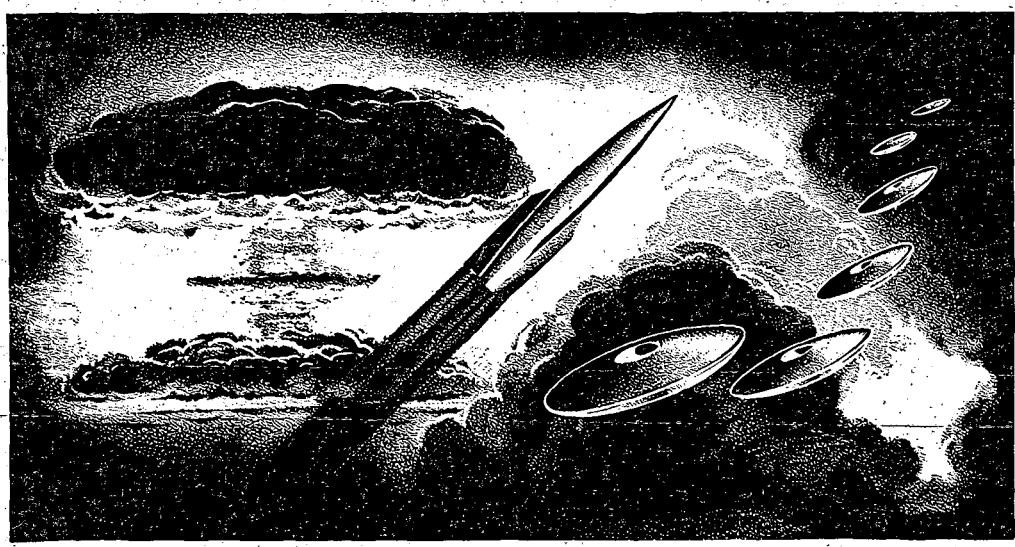

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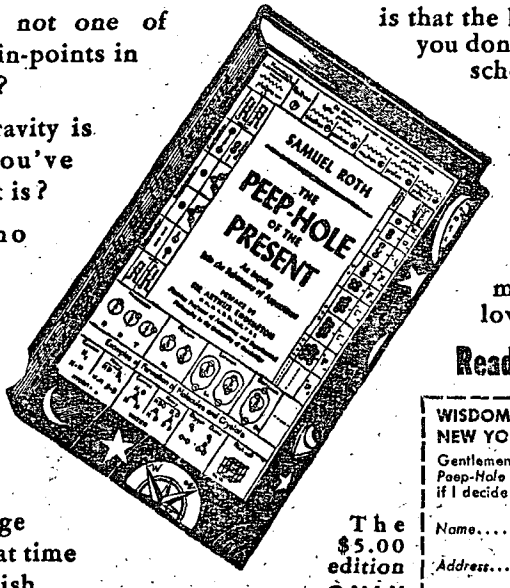

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

A FEW months ago we discussed the motion picture production, ROCKETSHIP X-M. At that time we said that we liked the film, recognizing that it contained a number of technical flaws. Since then we've noted in a number of fan magazines, and from correspondence, that opinion was divided on the worth of the film. The essence seemed to be that in the science-fantasy world it was accepted for want of a better commodity at the time. And the better commodity that was eagerly anticipated was DESTINATION MOON, a film in technicolor that took reportedly, two years to make.

WE'VE HEARD glowing reports on this film. DESTINATION MOON has been termed a real classic. Naturally we were anxious to see it ourselves. We did so the other night. We have this to report: DESTINATION MOON, in our humble opinion, was a fine technical production. It had nice camera work and all the science had been carefully worked out. But as a picture, that is to say, an entertaining story, we thought it fell flat on its craters. There wasn't a single character in the film that we felt any responsiveness toward. There wasn't any story to follow, no—urgency. We got the impression that it was a fine travelogue with some interesting scientific approaches to a coming thing.

WE COMPARED it, of course, to ROCKETSHIP X-M. We thought it lacked what ROCKETSHIP X-M had—a story. Similarly, of course, it contained much that ROCKETSHIP X-M did not—from the technical side. Now we're not saying we didn't like DESTINATION MOON. Quite to the contrary. But we do say that we feel it doesn't stack up from the entertainment side to ROCKETSHIP X-M. And after all, isn't that why we go to the movies—why, indeed, you're reading this very magazine? Of course it is. We all want to be entertained. And a good story is what provides that enjoyment. So while we applaude Hollywood's fine technical achievement, we decry the fact that no attempt was made to give us a story to root for at the same time.

WE CAN only hope that future science-fantasy films will not contain the major flaws of both of these efforts. Actually, a happy medium could easily be reached, such as, for example, ROCKETSHIP-XM having had the fine technical work of DESTINATION MOON, and DM having had more of a story, as R-X-M had. (We must say however that the story was on the "corny" side and certainly could stand improvement. The point we're stressing here is that a combination is needed.)

SO NOW we'll sit back and wait for the next film. We hope it will merit a complete rave notice. With all of the talent and money available in Hollywood, nothing less should suffice.

WE'VE GOT a news item this month that we're sure will interest you. Rog Phillips, not so well known under his real name of Roger P. Graham, went and tied the marital knot a week ago. It seems that Rog met a charming femme fan at the NORWESCON in Portland, Oregon, last September. The ensuing romance between Rog and Mari Wolf was swift and culminated at the altar last week. At the present time Rog and his bride are on their way to New York. We wish them all the happiness in the world.

ANOTHER item that must be mentioned here is the fact that the Fiction Group of Ziff-Davis, FA and AS, are moving to the New York offices of the Company. We want all of you fans to know this and remember to send your letters for the READER'S PAGE addressed to the magazine at 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N.Y. This will help in avoiding delay getting the RP material together. So keep the new address in mind.

ALSO, THE foregoing brings us to the announcement that this is the last editorial Yours Truly will write for FA. We're not going to get nostalgic about our five wonderful years with what we consider the best company in the business, and certainly the finest magazines. We're sad we have to say goodby, but for a number of reasons it's impossible for us to move to New York along with the magazines. We hope you've liked the job we did on FA. We think you did, because the circulation is right at the top of the pile! That makes us feel good. What are we going to do? Well, we have a lot of plans in mind; and promise that you'll be seeing us around again one of these days. In the meantime, thanks to you and all our friends at Ziff-Davis. And a fond salute to our FA.....wlh

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The Beast that Ravaged a World of Men & Women

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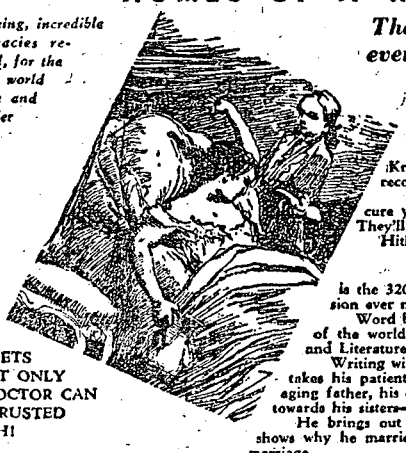

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Such records are usually sealed in secret files for professional reference only. But as he continued to treat his monstrous patient, three things dawned on Dr. Krueger:

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Dr. Krueger's escape to America and the publication of his book followed as matters of course.

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"Hitler flows into the madness of this age and

THE MADNESS OF THIS AGE

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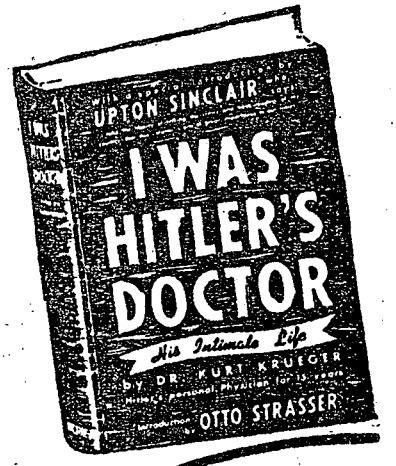

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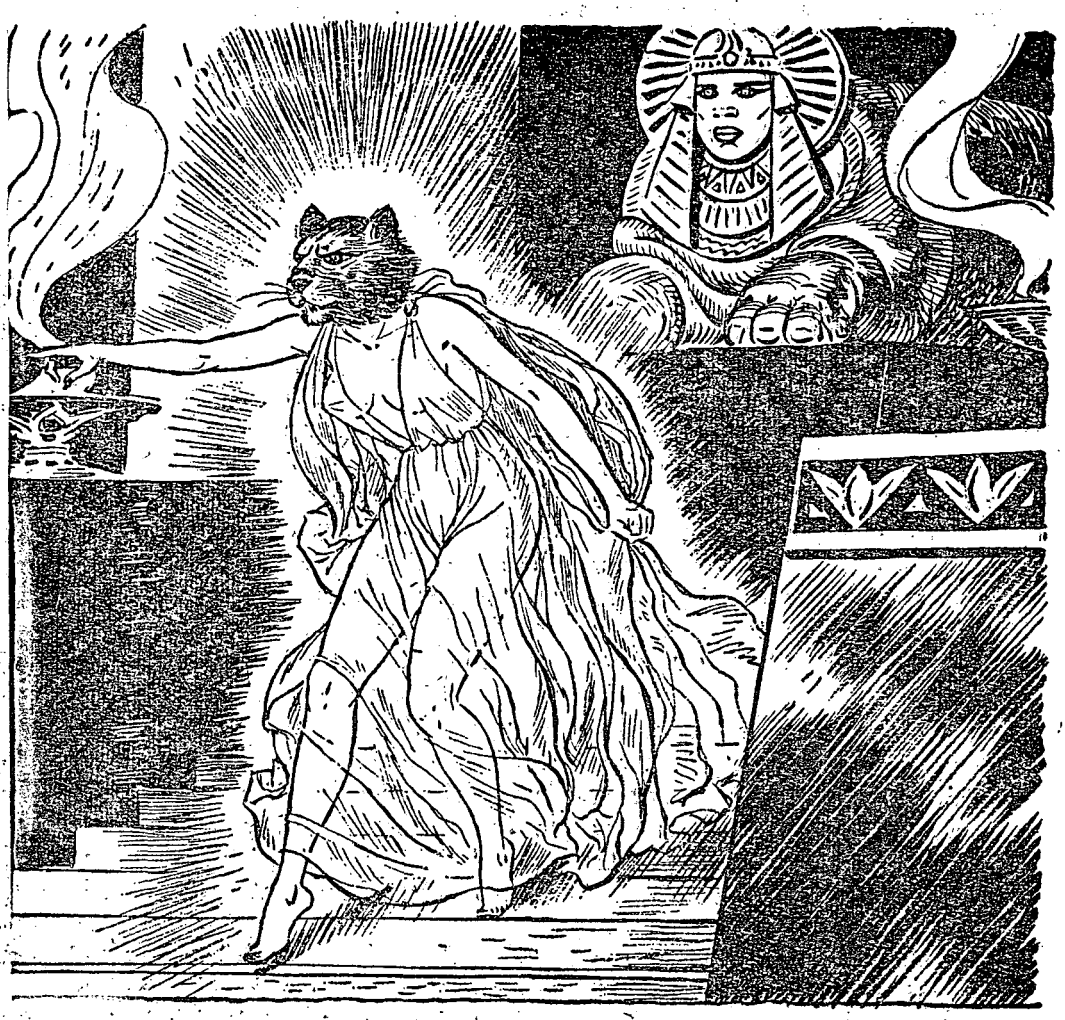
The SWORD OF RA

By Geoff St. Reynard

His triumph turned to sudden fear as the cat-woman pointed at him accusingly . . .



As a soldier Khafre had defeated many men in mortal combat. But now as a temple priest he faced the wrath of a Goddess . .

THEY SAT in comfortable armchairs on the jasmine terrace, with Ateera like a lovely child asprawl at their feet. Each of them had spoken in turn of his profession; lazily, for the day was hot, yet with the gravity that befits a man when he talks of his prime business in life. The priest had told a story of the nine great gods of the Ennead, who were before all other gods. The soldier had described with his long homely face alight how his troop of Nubians had conquered their foemen—"so easily, so almost carelessly!"—in the last action of the recent Barbarian skirmish in the south. The professional embalmer had mentioned the rising price of canopic jars, which held the viscera of a mummy; and

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amiably damned the grasping artisans who made them. Then, before they could begin the eternal argument as to which of their trades was most vital to the well-being of their country, Ateera said suddenly, "Look at the Nile!"

They stretched their necks and peered over the jasmine shrubs that grew on the rim of the terrace.

"Well?" said Khafre, the priest.

"See how the sun and the wind play at a game of fighting for the river!" the girl went on. "The sun puts a coat of his silver on the pale blue waters, and the wind, which always blows coolly out of the north, shatters the silver into millions of facets and shards, so that the blue shows through again. It's a game between them."

The trio of men regarded her silently. Then Horemheb the embalmer said slowly, "Sekht the ka-priest should not let his daughter run at large this way, because although she is nineteen she is still a very small child, who interrupts her elders with whimsical nonsense when they're talking great affairs of state." They all laughed. She put out her tongue at them.

It was the month of Athyr, the afternoon of the sixth day in the second decade in the month of Athyr, with the sun in the sign of the Scorpion. It was the third year of the peaceful reign of Amenemhet III, the son of the third Sesostris; the Twelfth Dynasty was in its glory.* But more important to the land of Egypt than all these dates and kings and dynasties was the fact that the Nile was several weeks sunken from its crest, and now it was time to sow the sorghum and wheat and barley. The Pleiades were all but set from the night skies, and Father Nile having retreated from his yearly flooding peak, the farmers were out with their implements and their bags of grain. Amenemhet was a splendid monarch, doubtless; but the Nile was once more sinking, and the life of Egypt must again be renewed from the seed sacks.

Thinking of these things, Horemheb pointed out across the waters. "They're sowing barley today in the great fields of your father," he said to Ateera. "By Isis, friends, you may chatter of fighting and prate of praying till you're blue in the face, yes, and I may mumble of undertaking, too! But where would we all be if it weren't for those sun-scorched fellows out there planting their barley?" He bent forward and looked at them with a scowl, as if he were going to make some weighty pronouncement. "We'd be sitting here with dry throats and no beer, that's where'd we be!"

Young Khafre chuckled. A handsome man of twenty-eight, clad in the undyed linen of the priesthood but framed and muscled like a swordsman, he appeared to burn with vitality even when he rested. It was odd to see him a religious. From sandals to lean classic face, in which dark eyes glittered joyously under straight black brows, he radiated adventure. This is a man, you would have said, who will make things happen.

"That trick of yours, Horemheb," he said, grinning. "That look of heavy thought, followed by some inane remark about beer, or women, or one or another little thing—"

"Little? Beer? Women? Oh, Khafre," said the embalmer, "you talk like a positive priest."

According to our modern calendar, it was November 16th, 1847 BC.

-St.R.

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THEY ALL laughed, the four friends; and Khafre would recall that it was the last time they laughed together for some days.

Ateera dipped a bronze cup in the jar of barley beer and handed it to the embalmer, who took it with an anticipatory smack of his lips. The Egyptian captain of Nubians, whose name was Ramaos, pushed back his tall helmet and said, "Pomegranate juice for me, Ateera, if you please."

The young priest Khafre had turned his head to look down toward the town. "Who's this?" he asked, standing up. "A stranger coming to the temple, I think. Wait for me here, while I greet him."

"Sit down, Khafre, he's turned off. He sees us."

Khafre sat down on the edge of his armchair, that was made of tamarisk wood inlaid with ebony. "I don't know," he said aloud, for no particular reason. "I don't know. I feel queer."

"Too much beer."

"One cup! No, I—my backbone crawls. As though a man were notching his arrow behind me."

Ramaos, who understood such feelings, said quickly, "Perhaps this is an enemy, Khafre. You have been a fighter, and will never lose your sixth sense."

Khafre nodded absently. "Ra may indeed be warning me of danger."

Horemheb the embalmer, who was a skeptic, looked down his nose and drawled a quiet "Hmmm." Ateera said, "He is not an ill-looking man, if somewhat too thin for my taste."

"Such brazen remarks do not become the daughter of an important ka-priest, my dear," remarked Horemheb jokingly, but neither the soldier nor the priest laughed. They were glancing, now at the approaching stranger, now at each other; and they were not quite comfortable.

"Is he a priest?" asked Ramaos.

"Yes, but his garments are strange to me. What god he serves, I don't know. The man may be all very well, but—Ramaos, do you remember when we fought the Bedouin Arabs in the south, and I slew the leader who was cutting at your head?"

"In the days when you were called the Brand of Ra, a free-lancing adventurer, though born to the priesthood. I remember, Khafre. I still carry the scar on my shoulder, where his blade slid down as he dropped."

"When we first sighted him, alone on a sand dune, I felt as I do now, Ramaos."

The soldier looked serious and bit his lip. "Now Selkit aid us! This is not to be taken lightly."

"Hush, he can hear us now." Khafre stood up and bowed formally. "Praise Ra who floods the Two Lands with light, for he has brought you safely a great distance, brother," said he in the prescribed formula. "Thanks also to Isis for your unexpected company."

"Praise Ra," said the strange priest curtly, halting before them. "I seek the Divine Fathers of this temple." He was not unhandsome in feature, as the girl had said; his skin was lighter than the deep ruddy bronze of the four friends, he was lean and tall, and his face held a saturnine, sly look. "I am Psamtik, priest of the great goddess Bast in Bubastis of Lower Egypt to the north. Where are the Divine Fathers?"

"I am Khafre, priest in charge of the temple, which is sacred to Thueris. The Divine Fathers have sailed to Memphis at the request of the king..." his voice dwindled off. It was no business of this fellow's that the Divine Fathers had hastened

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away at a call of Pharaoh's, who had suddenly been seized with a desire to know all about the hippopotamus goddess, Thueris. This temple was the most important one in Egypt to be dedicated to her, therefore Amenemhet had beckoned, and Khafre, who had been a priest for only six years, found himself sudenly in full charge of the other priests and the rites and duties. "They have journeyed to Memphis," he said again, "and will be gone some months. Can I serve you? I am the senior priest."

PSAMTIK LOOKED at him. "Young for it," said he. "Well, Khafre, I will talk to you, then. Am I invited to be seated and partake of some beverage? Dark red wine out of Syria, perhaps, or Keda beer?"

"There is barley brew, and pomegranate juice in that jug."

"So large a temple, too," said the stranger, sitting down in one of the armchairs. "I expected Syrian wine at the least. Thank you, girl," as Ateera gave him a bronze cup.

"This is the embalmer Horemheb, the captain of Nubians Ramaos, and Ateera, daughter of the ka-priest Sekht," said the young priest uncomfortably. The stranger was not likeable. "We prefer our own barley beer in this town, Psamtik. And we did not expect guests."

Psamtik crossed his legs, pushing aside the straight bronze sword he wore in a scabbard hanging from his girdle. "I meant no offense, brother. It was only that—well, such a large temple—there must be plenty of money in this town. Riches in grain and oil and timber, cattle and sheep and linen . . . copper and silver and gold too. Yes. Plenty of wealth in a place this big, and sporting such a temple."

"We have rich men hereabouts," said Horemheb complacently. "They have very large and very expensive funerals. Bless 'em all!"

Psamtik nodded. "And there must be enormous income to the temple, as it's the only major one in the place. Amulets and such-like to be sold by the hundreds, eh? Revenue in ring-money and land from the grateful supplicants. Right?"

Khafre bounded up, the trained muscles of a fighter taking him to his feet almost without the volition of his angry brain. He shouted, "What affair is it of yours, Psamtik, what revenues we take? They are small, only enough for the needs of our priests and for the proper worship of Thueris. Do you imply that we—"

"Sit down, young hothead. I imply nothing. I was merely making talk, and it seemed that the major temple of a flourishing town should be wealthy. Well, well! This is no auspicious beginning, is it? And I had hoped to find a friend in you, Khafre, for I am a missionary sent by my goddess to these parts."

"A missionary?"

"One who travels to distant parts in behalf of his god or goddess." Psamtik looked at the nearby temple in a calculating fashion. "Easily convertible, yes. We might even use those ugly statues of the hippo goddess, which are made of excellent rose granite; we could have artisans cut those hulking proportions down and bring to light a really beautiful cat's head where now sits a stupid-looking hippo's skull. . . ."

"What are you saying?" growled Khafre in a red rage.

"Why, my friend, I hope to persuade you that Bast is so far superior to your blundering hippopotamus Thueris that you will gladly fall in with my scheme—I mean my glorious plan—which is no less than to

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begin the spread of Bast's worship over all Egypt right here in your temple!" said Psamtik, his saturnine face taking on a look of righteousness that would have fooled almost anyone who had not seen how greedy that face had been a moment before. "Your Divine Fathers will return to find their temple enlarged, gaining immeasurably in revenue, and dedicated not to this plump and unattractive river-creature, but to the superb sleek cat goddess of Bubastis! What a surprise, eh? How you will grow in their regard! How—"

"How fast you move," murmured Horemheb the embalmer.

KHAFRE, WHO had managed to seat himself, leaped up again. "What drivel are you speaking, Psamtik? Change the goddess of our temple, raise our income, re-dedicate—I begin to think you are a dangerous madman."

"Manners, manners," said Horemheb gently. "Let me speak a minute. Allow me to sum up, sir. You are a missionary of the cat-headed Bast?"

"I am, sir."

"I have traveled greatly. I believe I recall this Bast. Her worship flourishes at a little place in Lower Egypt called Bubastis, where they celebrate a festival, a rather obstreperous festival, once a year."

"That is correct, embalmer," said Psamtik, grinning. "But let us say the worshipers are eager, and loud in their praises, rather than obstreperous."

"As you will. Now you intend to spread her worship throughout Egypt, beginning here at our unworthy town."

"Oh, don't call it unworthy!"

"A form of speech, sir. I esteem this pleasant place, I who have seen Syria and Ethiopia and Nineveh, Babylonia and Phoenicia and so many other cities and countries I can't recall them all. It's quiet here, and peaceful for an old man of forty-two. But I was recapitulating: you are going to—uh, carry the word, shall we say, to all the poor heathen places that know not Bast. You intend to step in, as for example here, and recarve the statues into likenesses of your feline, raise the revenues to a suitable level for such an important deity, see that the devotion of the populace is centered on her, and then move on, having profited—"

"Oh, only by the gratitude and esteem of yourselves, I assure you. I am an altruist," said Psamtik, in the oily-chuckling tone of one who does not care whether he is believed or not. "Devoted to Bast, I wish only to see her get her desserts."

"Which she will, doubtless," said Ramaos thoughtfully, eyeing his friend Khafre.

"I think you must be quite mad," said that gentleman to Psamtik. "The heat of the day is brewing your brains, priest of the cat."

Psamtik looked at him without rancor. "Not so mad that I cannot wonder over this place, brother. A strange situation! Big temple, purportedly small revenue, young—very young—priest in full charge. Why? It isn't quite what I expected. . . ."

"I had a vision of Ra!" said Khafre hotly. "It was confirmed as such by the Divine Fathers! I am the senior priest in experience, not in actual years of service."

"Ah, yes, of course. But why are there not a number of townsfolk at the temple, purchasing amulets and charms, making their devotions in payments of oil, spelt, fruits? Surely—"

"Priest of the cat, I do not like you," said Khafre between his teeth.

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"I do not like you at all. I suggest you take your way into the north again."

THE STRANGER stood up. "We will speak of this soon again," he said quietly, and strode unceremoniously away without a farewell. The four looked after him, and Horemheb said, "I don't understand something about this."

"I don't understand anything," said Khafre.

"That's because you were born to be a swashbuckling adventurer, rather than a subtle priest. I have the brain of a Pharaoh, myself," said the embalmer. "It's all plain to me. Except for one thing."

"Then tell us," said Ramaos, tugging his helmet into place from where it had slipped sideways on his shaven head.

"He's got a clever idea there. He insinuates himself, persuades the Divine Fathers of a temple to transfer their worship from one god to another, and rakes in the ring-money and land. Settles down and lives in princely fashion as a sort of power-behind-the-altar. The thing I don't understand is, why does he come here sowing the seed of this plan in such a slipshod, take-it-or-leave-it, high-handed way? Why is he such a—such an apparent blunderer in his groundwork? Why should he slam out with his notion just like that, ignore the sort of impression he's making, grin at being called names, and stalk off after he's done no more than hurl the basic idea at you? No, there's something behind this business, Khafre, something that doesn't meet the eye, and I don't much like it," said the embalmer, tugging fretfully at the small metal beard tied to his chin. "There's trouble a-boil, lads."

"What if he doesn't have to bother about making himself likeable?" asked Ateera suddenly. "What if he's so powerful that he can afford to act like that? If he has some strength behind him greater than his own?"

"Dear Ateera," said Ramaos, "my Nubians can smash any force he might bring here, I promise you."

"I didn't mean that," said the girl, huddling up at Khafre's knees as though she were cold. "I meant, not a mortal army, but an immortal goddess. What if his Bast is truly stronger than—than Thueris?"

"But we have the strength of Ra also," said the soldier confidently. "You know of Khafre's vision. Ra himself guards our priest."

Horemheb made a guttural noise of kindly ridicule. "Khafre's vision!" he said.

Khafre laid his hand on the girl's dark wealth of hair, and her great almond-shaped eyes, tawny ocher color against the bronze flawless skin, turned up to him lovingly, though he did not see them. He was looking at the embalmer.

"Horemheb," he said, "we know you are a disbeliever in anything above man, and because we love you we respect your opinions; but you should not laugh at my vision."

"I don't laugh at it, son. I simply regard it as an illusion."

"Illusion!" Khafre would have bounced up again had the girl not been in the way. "I saw our Father Ra as plainly as I see you in this instant! He was as real as this sunlight!" They had all heard the story many times, but he told it again. "Six years ago, in the month of Khoiak, I had come in my adventuring to a place of dismal swampland; and being careless, lost my footing and fell into a morass. I was sinking—aye, was up to my chin in the foul muck—when Ra appeared and grasping my hand

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As he sank into the muck a strange figure suddenly appeared in the air above him . . .

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pulled me forth with the strength of a dozen buffalo!"

"Very tangible sort of vision," muttered Horemheb.

"When he had set me on my feet I looked at him, and his beard was not false, but grew in flaming profusion all round his face, and both face and beard were red as the sun! At his side hung a sword of silver metal, gleaming brilliantly; his limbs were like great trees, knotted with muscle! He smiled on me, and I knew him for the greatest god of all, Ra!"

"My poor dear deluded friend," said Horemheb gently, "it was some well-disposed Barbarian or another."

"It was Ra! For when I had cleansed the slime from my body, he had vanished. I sought him everywhere, but he was gone. Then I took a vow to go back to the priesthood I was born to, and seeing a hippopotamus shortly thereafter, knew that I must serve Thueris and through her, Ra himself." Khafre was silent a moment. "So it may be as Ramaos says, and we needn't fear this fellow Psamtik inordinately, no matter what his power, because Ra guards our temple as well as Thueris."

Horemheb fumbled in his linen garments and drew out a tiny idol of bronze with a gold head and bright eyes of green enamel. "I found this mite in the ruins of an ancient clay-brick temple beside the Nile," he said. "I carry her to remind myself of something. In years aforetime, in the days of the remote Old Kingdom, before the Pyramid builders wrought their mighty works of futility, this wee idol was a god. Now her name is forgotten, the smoke of her worship no longer ascends to the heavens, and she is no more. So in time shall all your gods and goddesses be, Khafre. I have seen trees propitiated in the jungles, and black stones venerated in the desert. I look at your temples reared to Thueris and Sekhmet and Osiris, and I fondle my little lost mite with her green eyes and I smile. Futility, all that man makes is futility."

"You talk to hear yourself," said Ateera scornfully. "We know your great heart and the trouble you take to disguise it, Horemheb."

"Oh, I love my fellow man," said Horemheb, smiling. "I feel compassion for him. But I cannot help chuckling at his self-made gods."

"Which is a far cry from Psamtik and his curious proposal," said the soldier. "The man bewilders me. He's certainly cursed with an unfortunate personality. Isis! He made my hand itch for my sword's hilt."

"I say he's mad, and may be dangerous," said Khafre slowly.

"I say he's shrewd, but with a blind spot—he can't help grating on people's nerves," put in the embalmer.

"And I say watch him," counciled Ateera, her head on Khafre's knees. "Watch him, for surely he has put his trust in something stronger than he is . . . something, perhaps, stronger than us all."

CHAPTER II

THE FOUR friends stood together before the temple. The doorway, flanked by pylons, truncated pyramids of limestone, yawned darkly in the twilight. Twin statues of Thueris fronted the sloped pylons, and Horemheb leaned familiarly on the right-hand one and said, "Well, son, you know whom to call for if you need help."

"My Nubians need no more than an instant's notice," agreed Ramaos.

"And my father has many slaves who would fight for you, Khafre," said Ateera.

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"What would violence avail him?" asked the young priest reasonably. "Do you think he intends to slay me and capture the temple as though it were a hostile fortification? He'd need many men for such an attack, and even if he is mad, surely he can't have found a score of mad followers."

"I wasn't thinking in terms of violence exactly," said the embalmer. "I was—oh, never mind. We're all making this an affair of vast importance, when Psamtik only gave you a proposal, after all. Let's go to supper."

But as they were all walking off, Horemheb hesitated and came back. "Khafre, I'll be up later, to see if matters are well."

"Thanks, Horemheb. We'll have an argument about the gods."

"Bah," said the embalmer, turning away again. "Always trying to convert a man. Eat well, Khafre." He hurried after the others.

Khafre strolled into the doorway and through the first roofless courtyard to the hypostyle hall with its decorated pillars of many vivid colors lit now by the flares of oil lamps; he found himself glancing behind each column as he went down the wide center aisle, and tried to laugh at the nervous precaution. But the muscles of his back twitched and rippled, and he knew that his old soldier-of-fortune's instincts were at work in the secret channels of his mind. He thought of Psamtik. . . . a strange and ominous being!

He passed through the small sanctuaries, nodding to several other priests, and went into his own quarters. His servant had laid out a hearty supper: a quail stuffed with leeks and nuts and celery, a triagonal loaf of fine wheaten bread, radishes, onions, roots of garlic, honey-cake, a couple of slices of veal, barley beer and sweet Nile water and a fat bunch of grapes to top it off. He ate quickly, cleaning up the entire array. When he had been an adventurer—The Brand of Ra they had called him, he whose sword was a tongue of living flame—he had learned that food sometimes came at odd intervals, and must be eaten promptly before enemies appeared or other calamities interfered. The half-dozen years of priesthood had not cured him of wolfing his victuals, of storing up all the food he could get against the lean days which might come.

Popping into his mouth a lozenge flavored with Persian *zizafun* fruit, he arose and walked out past the sanctuaries into the great colonnaded hall.

The shadows of the multitudes of pillars were black and flickered eerily. It was odd that he had never noticed it before. The effect was—it was weird!

Take a grip on your nerves, Khafre, said he to himself. Not weird, but impressive; not eery, but solemn, stirring the mind to thoughts of the gods and their majestic ways.

He passed a long side aisle, glancing automatically toward a seated statue of the hippo goddess down at the far end. Four steps past it he halted, stiffening.

What had he seen there?

Hold hard, Khafre. Don't leap back like a frightened girl to stare with bulging eyes at the statue. Don't let imagination curdle your blood. Walk at a suitable pace down the side aisle, to assure yourself that your vision was playing tricks on you. Grin at your silly mistake.

He turned and went back to the aisle and strode down it to the end, where Thueris sat her gilded throne in magnificent obesity against a blank expanse of sandstone, one of a num-

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ber of similar statues round the walls.

Gilt throne very stately and solid. Thueris all correct, with her expression of amiable absence of thought. Wall as thick and substantial as ever. Nothing moving behind the ranks of columns graded back into darkness. Oil lamps flaring steadily.

How could he have imagined what he had seen there? Too much supper, perhaps, or a blurring of the eyeballs due to weariness.

But he was far from weary, and his meal had been no more than usually abundant. What, then, could have made him think he saw someone sitting—incredible sacrilege!—on the lap of the goddess?

What had caused the momentary apparition of a woman in filmy blue and white robes, sitting languidly with her arms on Thueris' arms and her head cocked quizzically in the lamplight as she eyed him with great green-glowing eyes of opalescent fire?

Eyes of malachite flashing terribly in the head of *a giant cat!*

CHAPTER III

KHAFRE awoke with his eyes open, his legs tensing, his hand reaching for a sword all in the fraction of a second between sleep and awareness. The sleeping chamber was dark as the heart of Set the boar-god. In the other bed Horemheb choked and gurgled in his sleep. The embalmer had sat late with him and decided to pass the night in the temple, a rather irregular procedure but allowable to one who held so sacred an office, atheist though he might be. No other sound came to the priest's keen ears, but nonetheless he groped for his bronze sword. It was not at his bedside. He reached behind the wooden pillow and drew out a narrow-bladed ivory dagger. Rolling over swiftly he came to his feet on the floor beside his couch. Nothing stirred.

He sniffed suspiciously. Then he put a hand on Horemheb's shoulder and shook him.

"What passes?" grunted the other.

"I don't know. Something woke me just now. I had a dream—a curious dream about a cat. Wake up, Horemheb, and see if you can smell anything unusual."

The embalmer sat up and Khafre heard him snuffle loudly. "I smell garlic," he said sourly. "Why you eat the accursed root I can't imagine. I smell a room that's been slept in. I smell a faint wisp of incense from the idols without. Hmm. No more."

"I smell two things more," said Khafre, "which may be too evanescent for the withered nose of an undertaker to catch, plagued daily as it is by the odors of brine, spices, bitumen and natron."

"Brag and yammer! What are these fleeting scents?"

Khafre frowned in the darkness. "Perfume and the redolence of a cat's fur."

Horemheb inhaled again. "Perfume. Yes, by the scattered bones of Osiris! Faint, sweet, almost like the incense but differing slightly. You're right, Khafre, it's the perfume of a woman's unguent!" He chuckled. "You sly dog, who've you got in here, eh?"

Khafre, ignoring this, struck a light and ignited an oil lamp. His bronze sword lay on the floor beside his rumpled bed. He picked it up. "I leaned that against my stool. If it had fallen we'd both have wakened. Strange. . . ah!" he cried, as one of the temple cats jumped out from under his couch and scuttled for the doorway. "No you don't, lady puss!" He snatched her up and buried his nose in her fur.

"There's your feline effluvium,"

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said the embalmer, lying back.

Khafre removed his nose and let the cat drop. It shot away into the dark. "No," he said in a puzzled voice, "it was a different sort of cat I smelled first. I can't exactly tell the difference, but—well, it smelled dead, rather."

"Gods, what a nose! It smells a dead cat lying down by the Nile."

"But not too dead, you know, not stinking, only like a dried and cured hide of a cat. Like a lion's pelt, a little, or a charioteer's robe of leopard skin."

"Go to sleep, Oh nose that walks like a man," grumbled Horemheb, putting an arm over his eyes.

"I think I'll just take a stroll round the temple first," said Khafre, belting on a linen garment with his sword harness. "Come along?"

"Not for a silver talent."

"Sleep, then, old man. The ancient need sleep."

Horemheb rose on an elbow, gave him a dreadful look of loathing, and with a sigh got off the couch and began to feel with his toes for his sandals. Khafre pushed him back and laughingly took his way into the recesses of the temple. Horemheb scratched his chest sleepily, then got out of bed and began to look for his false beard. Such imitation whiskers were ordinarily worn only on ceremonial occasions, but Horemheb never appeared without his at any time. It was a kind of private jest with him, the little metal beard. Where *had* he put it?

KHAFRE walked rapidly along the central nave, staring hard at each column as he passed it. He favored the seated statue of Thueris with an especially long look. Old placid Thueris eyed him back, no desecrating presence on her lap this time, at any rate. Khafre left the hypostyle hall and crossed the open courtyard, that was dim and ghostly in the waning moonlight. He felt as though someone were calling to him from an immeasurable distance, as though it was that which had awakened him. Something calling... calling with a trace of woman's perfume and the curious smell of cat.

He came out of the doorway in the great facade of the temple, and saw, standing beside one of the flanking statues, the priest from Bubastis.

"Psamtik!" he said, touching his sword. "What are you doing here at this hour?"

"I remind you, brother, that I'm a priest too, and may wander at will through your precincts." Psamtik's face was shadowed and saturnine. "I was just admiring the exquisite appearance of the place by moonlight. Wait till we've made these homely creatures into portraits of Bast, my friend! It will add unbelievably to the effect. Slice down these hog-jowls and slim these fat bodies to the likeness of my goddess—ho, what a difference!"

"You are a madman," said Khafre, keeping a tight rein on his emotions. "As such I pity your babblings, and do not kill you. Go away, Psamtik. We will not re-dedicate this temple to any feline deity. Go home and try to regain your sanity."

"Queer, that's what your girl was saying to me only this evening," said the priest, leaning comfortably against Thueris' haunch.

"My girl?" repeated Khafre blankly.

"Ateera. I visited the ka-priest Sekht, as a matter of courtesy, and while telling him my plans for the temple was interrupted and reviled by the girl."

"Ateera is not my affianced," said

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Khafre formally.

"Well, you're blind as an eyeless river-worm, then, for she's in love with you, and a prettier wench I never saw, albeit her face is a little flat." Psamtik stretched. Khafre realized suddenly that the man's movements were catlike, slow and graceful as the animal whose hybrid likeness he claimed to serve. "I hope you've been giving some thought to my proposition," he went on, "because where I go Bast goes; I'm a special favorite of hers, you see. She's powerful—she will be more so. Things happen to those who scorn my requests, friend priest," he said, and his shadowed face abruptly thrust forward so that his sloe-colored eyes glittered directly into Khafre's. "Things that are decidedly unpleasant. Bast is a jealous goddess. Be wise, friend; let us sit and discuss my proposition over a jug of Syrian wine."

"I'll discuss nothing with you, Psamtik. Look, man," said Khafre, trying to talk sense into him, "if you must spread your Bastite worship hereabouts (and Ra knows I would not stop you, for all the gods must have their just due), why then, set up your own temple. Do as the ancient priests of Thueris did, beginning with a small house of sun-baked bricks of river mud. Gain your prestige and revenue slowly, as is proper and right for our craft. Why must you sail in like a king's heedless pleasure boat on the Nile, running down those who stand in your way, making demands that are fantastic and ridiculous? Such devotion as yours to Bast should produce great results if channeled rightly, Psamtik!" He paused for breath, and then asked, "What would the Divine Fathers say, if I were fool enough to fall in with your scheme? What would Pharaoh himself say, who is now interested in Thueris?"

"They would say, This is a marvelous doing; for they would hear of miracles here such as have not rocked Egypt since the Pyramids were begun. Bast will create miracles that will resound over the Two Lands!" cried Psamtik in a fanatic's voice.

"Miracles?"

"Word would spread throughout the world of them, Khafre!"

"But if such occurred, and I did allow the temple to be re-dedicated to your cat goddess—this is only an example, Psamtik, for I have not that much authority—what would Thueris do in her righteous anger? She would blast me with lightnings."

"NOT WITH Bast on your side. Not after some of the miracles Bast would show. I can promise you that *Bast herself* would appear in this temple, Khafre!" said the other, prodding him in the chest with a lean forefinger.

"But to re-dedicate a holy temple to another deity—this thing might create a dissension in the ranks of the gods themselves! We could begin a war in the Underworld!"

"And what is that to us, who would be serving the strongest god under Ra? I tell you this Bast is invincible!"

"The idea is completely insane!" roared Khafre; and because he could not think of another argument in the face of this bland idiocy, he hauled out his bronze sword and flourished it. Psamtik hastily took a step backwards.

"Very well. Wait until Bast herself has shown you, brother. Then we'll talk again. But because you have been so stubborn, I think you will grieve over a loss or two before we come to terms. Good night!" He hur-

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ried away toward the town.

"Well," said Horemheb out of the gate shadows, and Khafre jumped. "Still more of a brawler than a religious, aren't you, son? If you're at a loss for words you grasp a weapon. Khafre, you're wasted in a temple; you ought to be leading Pharaoh's armies."

"I thought you'd gone back to sleep," grumbled Khafre.

"No, I've been here. I think I have a line on that gentleman's thought processes, too."

"He's an irresponsible fanatic."

"Oh, a fanatic, doubtless; but not the sort you think. He's a fraudulent fanatic, except that he's mad on wealth. Otherwise he'd be doing what you suggested, building his own temple and starting in a small way to gain devotees. Not that one, though! He's insane with greed. Takes a look at your gigantic temple—really much too big, I've often thought, for this town—and the saliva rises in his mouth with thoughts of gold and silver and land. That man's sort is a plague on Egypt, Khafre. Better a thousand half-reformed adventurers like yourself in the priesthood than one dirty grasping thief like him."

"But what does he hope to gain with these veiled threats and fantastic cajolings?" asked Khafre, all at sea.

"Just what he says: a re-dedication of the temple, with a very big slice of the revenue."

"But *I* couldn't do a thing like that, even if I would! The Divine Fathers—"

"Are old men, who would tend to fall in with Psamtik's idea if it were already an accomplished fact when they returned. Especially if, as he suggested, there'd been a couple of so-called miracles which seemed to indicate that Bast demanded the change. She's a little goddess, but gods grow and gods decline in stature like the wheat of the field, friend Khafre. He must have done some elementary spy work around here before accosting you, and knows the essential weakness of the old head priests. He's spotted you as a tough one, hard to convince but a perfect ally for him once your mind's been changed."

"Which it never will be."

"Naturally. The man's no ally for such as you, or even such an old fumble-fingered scoundrel of an agnostic as I. But there's trouble in the wind, son. He's mad and he's bad, and clever withal."

"And he might have some magical powers," said Khafre thoughtfully, remembering his momentary vision of the evening.

"Yes," agreed Horemheb seriously, "he might at that. Talking as he did about visions and miracles and all that. He might be a conjurer of a sort. Mind you, I don't believe in much that I can't lay a fingertip to; but sometimes a man has powers that even I can't explain."

"A major victory for me," said Khafre, turning back into the dim courtyard. "I..."

"You what?" asked Horemheb, when the other had been quiet for a full minute.

"What? Oh, I was saying that I'd made you admit there were some few things you couldn't explain. I just remembered...."

"Well, what?"

"Tomorrow—today, rather, for the dawn's near—is the seventeenth day of Athyr."

"So it is."

"A day of ill omen, Horemheb, a day of terrible memory. It was on this date in the twenty-eighth year of his reign that Osiris was murdered by Set. Calamities can happen on such

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a day."

"Calamities, friend priest, can happen on any blessed day they choose; and the greatest of them at my age is to lose half a night's sleep. Let's go back to bed."

"No, you go. I shall meditate, before the statue of Thueris."

"Youth, youth! Resilient bones and limitless vitality! Well, call out if you have need of me, Khafre."

"Of course. Sleep well."

"Once more good night."

"Ra go with you."

"Ra. Ha!" said the embalmer under his breath, and disappeared into the depths of the nearest aisle of pillars.

CHAPTER IV

CHOOSING, for no particular reason, the seated statue which had figured in his strange experience of the evening, Khafre knelt before his goddess. He ignited some little cones of incense and repeated in an absent-minded way a prayer or two from the morning devotions. His mind would not focus wholly on his pious duties, however. He wondered about the loss that Psamtik had spoken of; what would it be? He felt deadly certain that something would happen. Psamtik, an obvious bungler in carrying out his irrational folly, was still a dangerous creature to be roaming about with a grudge against one. He sighed a trifle. If these were the old days, now, one good swipe of a sword....

His nose wrinkled. Without moving a muscle he sat on his knees before Thueris, staring at her feet, questing the air with his nose that was as keen as any hunting leopard's. The sweet scent of the unguent, which he had first detected in his sleeping quarters, was all about him.

He bowed himself down, hunching over in apparent adoration. But when he came upright it was with a terrific spring that put him on his feet in a split second, whirling about with his bronze sword tossing hectic red reflections from the oil lamps.

Between two columns stood a black and indistinct figure. In shadow, with arms akimbo and head tilted as it intently regarded him, it stood motionless as he. Seeing it, he instantly took up a defensive position with his weapon thrust forward. It was some twenty feet away. A silhouette, no more; and yet when an infinitesimal movement of the head brought the eyes into a stray flickering beam of thin light, they leaped into horrible life, gleaming like twin emeralds made of supernal fire!

He gasped in amazement. The outline was unmistakable: a woman's body—and a good one too—topped by a great cat's head!

For the first time in his life Khafre felt a brief giddiness, a half-swoon of utter and absolute fear.

Then he stiffened his back and growled out, "I challenge you in the sacred name of Ra, you apparition of the darkness!"

The formula did not work. The hybrid horror remained where it was, staring at him with the enormous chatoyant eyes.

He forced himself to take two steps nearer, so that he could distinguish some detail in the dark figure. Doubtless it was the same one he had seen sitting on the lap of the statue. The body was clothed in very fine, almost transparent, linen; the head was indeed a perfect cat's head, enlarged out of all reason.

The thing put up one arm and pointed to him. A soft, sibilant voice purred out from between the lips, as though a cat had been given human vocal cords. He blinked and involun-

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tarily stepped back again.

"Psamtik is right, priest; I am more powerful than your clumsy river goddess, for I was spawned of Ra himself, while Thueris emerged from a bed of papyrus in the Nile. Heed my words, mortal! Agree to Psamtik's proposal."

"Never," said Khafre huskily, cleared his throat and repeated it in a louder voice. "Never!" He then closed his eyes and waited to be struck dead. Nothing happened. He opened them. The hybrid creature with the terrible eyes was gone. He strode forward to examine the place on which she had stood, and a black temple cat came out of the darkness to rub against his bare legs with affection. Ingloriously he took to his heels and ran for his quarters and the rational company of Horemheb the embalmer.

CHAPTER V

THEY PACED up and down the jasmine terrace in the warm morning sunlight, middle-aged Horemheb trying vainly to match his length of stride with that of young Khafre and the soldier Ramaos.

"As plain as your long face before me this instant, Ramaos!" Khafre was saying. "I thought those awful eyes would engulf me! And when she spoke—gods!" He shuddered. "It was Bast, truly. What might, what powers she must have, to appear thus in a temple of Thueris! I begin to think Psamtik, for all his greed and overbearing manner, is right. A rededication of the temple would not be too far out of line...."

"Never say die," urged Ramaos. "My Nubians await your call, Khafre."

"What can man do against the gods?" he asked hopelessly.

"Well, the gods grow old and die, do they not?"

"They do, and their bodies are mummified, whereafter they rule the dead in the Underworld. All men know that—except Horemheb, of course."

"Then if they die, why may they not be slain?" asked Ramaos. The priest glanced around him.

"Don't say such things, Ramaos. I tell you this Bast is something new in the way of goddesses. She appears as a corporeal being, with the fragrance of perfume and the odor of cat to herald her. She is not as other deities. By Ra, but I believe Psamtik may be right!"

"Perhaps Ramaos is correct, though," said Horemheb, with that deeply serious expression, the genuineness of which they could never be sure of. "The gods do die. One can journey about Egypt and see the places where their mummies are buried. Isn't the mummy of Anhouri at Thinis? And Toumou's buried at Heliopolis? As for Osiris, you can go practically anywhere and find a bit of him: his backbone at Busiris, his head at Memphis, his neck at Letopolis, his heart entombed at Athribis, another head at Abydos, and his complete mummy at both Mendes and Sais. Surely this plurality of parts shows Osiris to be a veritable wonder among gods!" He could not help grinning then, but went on. "Now as Ramaos says, if they can die so thoroughly, possibly they can also be killed by a mere man. Khafre, let him bring up a squad of Nubians! They'll pink this Bast in the center of her horrid belly and send her to the ministrations of Anubis before you can say Meow."

"Blasphemer," grunted Khafre. "Besides, it wasn't a horrid stomach at all, it was—well, quite beautiful."

"You can see better than most men in the dark. Or perhaps you got closer

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to her than you admitted?" asked Horemheb slyly.

Ignoring him, Khafre said, "I wish I'd been a little more sensible with Psamtik. He'll surely do something evil now. How could I know his Bast was so powerful?"

"You aren't talking like yourself, son. Where's the heedless swashbuckler of yore?"

"*You* didn't see the goddess," said the priest gloomily.

A squat, stolid-looking man in the rough linens and tight-fitting black cap of an embalmer's assistant came up to them as they were arguing. He bowed to Horemheb and said, "Sir, a strange priest has come to our establishment and desires speech with you."

"His name?"

"Psamtik."

"What does he want with me?" asked Horemheb with surprise, and the assistant shrugged. "He didn't say."

"I suppose I'd best see the man, Khafre. I'll be back soon." He hastened off, tugging fretfully at the metal beard on his strong chin.

It was more than an hour later when he returned. "Well?" asked Khafre eagerly.

"He wasn't there. I waited about, but he never came again. Some fool trick of his, I suppose. I dislike that man more with every passing minute. He made me walk two miles in this heat for nothing."

THEY SAT down and drank pomegranate juice. Another figure appeared on the temple path and came slowly toward them. They recognized an old slave of the ka-priest Sekht. "Well?" said Khafre.

"My master wishes to know if Ateera is here, Oh priest," said the old fellow formally. "She has vanished from the house, and it is unlike her to leave without some word of her destination."

"No, she isn't here. Maybe she's visiting in the town."

"Not without telling her father," said the slave, shaking his grizzled head. "She never wanders away in such a fashion."

"I don't like this," said Khafre to Horemheb. The embalmer frorwned. "Neither do I. Ateera may be a scatter-brained little nuisance at times, but she's too dutiful a daughter to skip off without a word." He stood up. "Khafre, it occurs to me—"

"What has already occurred to me," said Ramaos. "The priest of the cat has a finger in this thing."

Khafre bounded up, hand seeking hilt as he moved. "Psamtik! He said—he said I would sustain a loss." He looked at Horemheb uncertainly. "Could he have meant—*Ateera?*"

"By Ra, if he did, he's dead meat, him and his cursed goddess," said Horemheb wickedly. "He is, indeed, a fool; but this . . . !"

Ramaos pointed silently down the path. Another figure was climbing toward them. "What now?" asked Khafre. Then they saw it was the priest of Bast.

"I'll slit his damned gullet," rumbled Khafre, drawing his sword.

"Lad, you'll have that blade dulled with all your hauling at it. Put it up. Ateera may very well be asleep under a grapevine somewhere."

"I have a feeling," said Khafre, and left it at that; but he did not sheathe the weapon.

"The fighting man rises above the priest," said Horemheb to himself wisely. "Good! Some action is what we can use in this silly affair." And he awaited the coming of Psamtik with more eagerness than was quite proper in a peace-loving embalmer.

Psamtik stood before them. Black eyes glistened in the bony face and

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Khafre dropped his sword, leaped forward upon Psamtik and began to throttle him . . .

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he smiled grimly, "Well, priest of the hippopotamus?" he said.

"Where is Ateera?" grated Khafre.

"How should I know? Have you seen anything in your temple?"

"How did you know that?" cried Horemheb, leaning forward. "How did you know that, priest?"

"Bast tells me many things in the watches of the night," said Psamtik smoothly. "She relies on me to further her cause. She says she has spoken with this acolyte."

"Acolyte!" roared Khafre indignantly. He waved his bronze blade under Psamtik's nose. "What have you done with Ateera, you swineherd?" he howled. "Produce her this instant, or I carve your jackal-face in two!"

Psamtik stepped back. "Gently, gently. If the lovely Ateera has disappeared, I know it not. I saw her but this morning."

"You saw her? Where?"

"This priest was at the home of Sekht," put in the ka-priest's old slave. "He had speech with Ateera in the court by the lotus pool. Thereafter we saw her no more, I remember."

KHAFRE DROPPED his sword, leaped upon Psamtik and began to throttle him. Horemheb and Ramaos hastily separated them. Khafre was bellowing like a goaded bull. "I'll cleave him to the breastbone! I'll tear out his slimy eyes!"

"Fine talk for a priest," said Psamtik, feeling gingerly of his throat. "If the girl has gone, truly, then perhaps Bast is punishing you thus for disregarding her commands. I know nothing of the girl." He turned and hurried away down the path toward the city. Horemheb pushed the maddened Kahfre into an armchair and held him there until the insane light of battle left his dark eyes. Then he said, "Steady, son. We must move with circumspection. Ateera is at stake."

"He knows something, Horemheb." Ramaos was thoughtful.

"Yes, he knows all right."

"Then I'll rip it out of him!" shouted Khafre.

"No, no. He's a fanatic. You can't torture a confession from a fanatic, even if he's only fanatical about wealth. Let's use our brains. Ramaos, can you detail some of your soldiers to search for the girl?"

"I can."

"Do it. Have them beat the reeds for a mile around her father's house. Have them drag the lotus pool. Have them search the quarters of this stranger, wherever he's staying. They all know Ateera. See that they look everywhere for her, in every home and grainbin." He girded up his belt. "I'll go down to my embalming rooms and start out from there through the town. We'll find the girl, never fear."

"And I'll—"

"You'll stay here, Khafre. You can't leave the temple. You know that."

"If Ateera's in danger I—"

"Will leave it to your friends!" Horemheb glared at him. "You chose the priesthood, Khafre. Stick to it. Besides," he said, stroking his false beard, "there's something here that's out of joint that annoys me; and you're the logical man to unravel it. It's that goddess Bast. That apparition business. I don't like it. And if it's ever to have light shed on it, I think it will have to be here in the temple. Stay here and keep your eyes open, Khafre—your eyes and your keen nostrils."

Khafre watched them go, his face despondent.

The sun god climbed the heavens in his sacred blazing-hot bark, and reached his zenith and sailed slowly

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down toward the horizon. No one came back. All through the town and along the Nile black soldiers sought for the missing girl; Ramaos harried them to superhuman speed, while Horemheb ferreted about here and there and asked penetrating questions; but nightfall came and no trace of the beautiful Ateera had been found. Alone and nearly out of his wits with rage and worry, Khafre the priest paced through his empty pillared corridors and waited for something to happen. His supper was laid out and the venison and goose grew stone cold on the table. The oil lamps were lit, and the shadows grew black as the bitumen on a tomb's guardian statues. And no one came, and nothing happened. The anniversary of Osiris' murder drew slowly and ominously toward its close.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT THE tenth hour after midday he retired to his quarters and taking off his garments began to shave his whole body. A priest was obliged to do so thrice a week. Now it helped to pass the time, that dragged so dreadfully.

When he had finished, having cut himself with the razor half a dozen times and sworn viciously by all the gods he could bring to mind, he robed himself and went into the hypostyle hall once more. All his servants and the lesser priests were abed now. He had taken it upon himself to watch through the night before Thueris' statue, in case of a reappearance of the goddess Bast; all the long day he had been working himself into a fury against the sacred-teratoid feline. She was behind all the trouble, he was certain of it. Dear Ateera, his friend, stolen or kidnapped or worse; perhaps taken by Psamtik, for use as a kind of club over Khafre's head. And Psamtik served this monstrous cat-headed deity. Let her beware! He ground his teeth on a very unreverent curse. Goddess or not, he, who had touched the hand of mighty Ra and served for years in the temple of Thueris, he would outface her and demand....

He halted. She was seated on the broad lap of the hippo's statue, her blue and white draperies floating in the cool gusts of a small stray wind that penetrated the temple. Oil lamps shed their beams directly upon her, and she was as corporeal and ponderable as Khafre himself. The body was flawless in its svelte lines—indeed, one naked leg thrust out provocatively from the folds of the fine linen was as perfect a limb as he had ever seen or imagined—but the head was a horror. The fur, gray and rather ratty looking, lay not as that of a cleanly cat, but rumpled and raised in tufts, sleeked here and there as though by moisture, dull brownish in other patches like a thing that was long dead. The eyes bore into him, huge ovals of pulsating green-blue irisation; and even twenty feet away Khafre could discern in them a ghastly lifeless quality, a lack of emotion that raised the skin of his body in cold sweaty bumps of fear.

With an effort of will that did him great credit, Khafre moved slowly toward the goddess Bast.

In one hand she held a gilt sistrum, the rounded frame with its quartet of transverse musical rods topped by a tiny figurine of herself. She lifted it idly and shook it, so that the high-pitched tinkle of its voice jangled away amongst the pillars of the temple.

"Come here, mortal," she said, the purring voice emerging between motionless lips; her mouth was partially opened and it was scarlet and black

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within, two pointed fangs projecting from the sides evilly. "Come here, handsome priest. Do honor to the goddess of Bubastis. Kneel to Bast."

He stood stiff-necked and proud before her, looking up into the prismatic eyes that never blinked. "I bow to no interloper in the sacred place of Thueris, Oh cat."

"Rash man, I could blast you where you stand." She waved the sistrum at him in an effeminate gesture. "Are you so brave that you do not fear me, then?"

"I fear you, Bast," he said frankly, and felt that his cold lips were probably pale in the lamplight. "But I feared many a foeman in the days of my free-lancing, and yet faced and conquered them all. I will face you, cat goddess, even if I should not be able to vanquish you."

She leaned forward, and the perfume of her unguent was mingled with the curious dead-pelt reek of her feline head. "Do as Psamtik asks you, Khafre," she murmured softly. "Dedicate this place to me, and I will visit you often. You are as fine a young man as ever I saw, Khafre. Follow Psamtik's desires, and I will accept you—as a lover, Khafre."

He took a pace backwards and nearly gagged. She snarled. "Am I such a crone that you scorn me, a goddess?"

"Your form is perfection, Bast, but a man cannot mate with a cat, nor with a hybrid of cat and woman, however lovely her body may be." Khafre hoped that his words were well chosen. His knees were knocking quietly together. "Leave me, Bast; leave the temple of Thueris, I cajole you in the sacred names of Ra and of Osiris. And of Set," he added hastily, in case she should be one of the gods who feared the great black boar who had murdered Osiris. "In Set's name, go!"

She laughed softly through the immovable cat lips. Then she slipped off the hippo's lap and came toward him. With shaking hand he touched his bronze sword, but it gave him no confidence. He backed into a pillar. She stood toe to toe with him and the unguent was heady in his nostrils, but sharply and unpleasantly laced with the scent of dead hide. The huge nacreous eyes glared into his own startling dark ones. The feline voice whispered, "Surely any mortal would die for the privilege of loving a goddess...."

But suddenly he was not listening. He was staring at the left eye of the enormous cat head. It was an oval of blue-green fire, with the reflection of the nearest oil lamp dancing on its surface; it had an unholy sheen that stabbed into a man's vitals. He was not looking directly at the eyeball, however, but at the outer corner of the socket. There was a little gap between eye and fur, a gap in which showed half a dozen short white tendrils, as though the roots of the orb were exposed by some hideous wound.

Short white tendrils betwixt fur and edge of eye....

Short white lengths of linen thread.

CHAPTER VII

HOREMHEB was going up to the temple. He climbed the hill wearily, for he was out of condition and had been dashing hither and thither all day long. He was, however, talking aloud to himself. It was an old and unshatterable habit of his, acquired on many long lonely journeys about the world. Even shortness of breath could not cure him of doing it.

"By Isis, she can't have puffed into s m o k e—poo-oof—and she wasn't thrown into the Nile—errgh—because

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the fishermen were out early with their nets and spears all up and down the river—ah! what a slope!—and she isn't anyplace in town because the whole population is alarmed now—poo-oof—and it's clear now that she was either spirited away somehow by Psamtik as a sort of hostage, or was slain by him as reprisal for Khafre's stubbornness, and her body hidden. Wowf!"

He stopped to regain his breath, still proclaiming his suspicions to the cool night air.

"It all ties in somehow, though *how*—there's the problem. Let's see. Psamtik calls at my establishment and sends for me, but when I arrive he's gone. Ateera disappears. Khafre has seen what he swears is a vision of Bast not once but twice, and it's spoken to him. Most ungodlike behavior, judging from my knowledge of hallowed divinities! Now where's the meeting point of all these curious incidents? What ties them together?" He shook his head and began to plod on. "Bast. That's the queerest part of the whole business. Could I have been wrong about the gods? Could forty-two years of experience have taught me nothing but a false theory concerning them? Could there—oof! —could there actually be a hierarchy of gods? With animal heads and all that nonsense?"

He spat dryly. "What, with an Underworld full of dead Egyptians, and Osiris judging them while jackal-faced Anubis looks on and ibis-headed Thoth writes down their deeds on immortal sheets of papyrus? Horemheb, you're getting soft. There's some other explanation. Bast, Bast...a woman with a cat's head. A—I've got it!" he shouted breathlessly, halting and throwing up his arms. "I've solved it! Bast, eh? Ha! I see it all!"

"Too bad," said a voice behind him. He turned his head to find who had spoken so close to him; glimpsed a falling object just above the line of his vision; felt a terrific blow on the side of his skull; and fell into a bottomless pit of jetty blackness.

CHAPTER VIII

HE WAS walking, had been walking for many years, it seemed. On through gloomy dim corridors he struggled, his feet lifting slowly as though sucked back by heavy mire. It was a labyrinth he was caught in, a meandering endless path between frowning walls that were sticky to the touch, under a roof of solid unrelieved black.

Horemheb scowled. Where was he? How had he come here? And where on earth was he going?

Or was he on earth at all? Was he not, perhaps, under it?

He thought painfully. He had been going to the temple. He wanted to tell Khafre something. Something about Bast. Bast! He remembered. He had solved the riddle of the apparitions.

Then someone had hit him. Evidently with a club, or a small tree, or the hilt of a bronze sword. Psamtik?

Psamtik, very likely!

And had Psamtik then dropped him into a well or some deep hole, in the rocks beyond the town? A hole that communicated with this underground passage?

He smacked his hands together. The noise was muffled and without echo in this strange place. Suppose, now, that the ancient Egyptians, oh, centuries before King Menes of the First Dynasty, suppose they had tunneled out these galleries for reasons of—

Well, for reasons of their own. Protection, perhaps. From—from somebody else.

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And now he'd been pitched into them, to wander around and explore them and find all sorts of interesting relics.

He had a distasteful look at the sticky walls, and went slogging onward.

There were just two things he didn't understand. Where did the illumination, dim and uncertain though it was, come from? And why couldn't he remember waking up and starting this crazy stroll?

Far ahead a wavering light appeared. He exerted all his strength and went toward it at a shambling trot. Slowly it grew until he saw that the narrow tunnel emerged into a great room filled with golden light. He grinned through his gaspings. Sanctuary from the grisly loneliness of the labyrinth.

He came out into the room and saw that it stretched away limitlessly to horizons so beclouded and distant that they could only be half-seen, half-imagined. The ceiling was all a high gold glow. A light soft wind played about his whitened cheeks and touched his clammy hands.

Directly before him stood a gigantic table built in the shape of a coffin. Upon it was a huge gold-and-silver balance, on one scale of which lay a feather. The legend shot into his mind: the heart of a dead man was weighed against the feather that was Truth, and if it were found wanting in good deeds and honest reverence—well, that was a pity, but then a man had had every chance during his life to be decent and pay the requisite homage to the gods, so whatever he got was his own fault.

Behind the scales a tall man was seated with his head down so that his face could not be seen. Surrounding him, great anthropomorphous figures were gathered. Horemheb in an ecstasy of horror saw a hawk's beak, an ibis' long bill, the mask of a feral-looking jackal. Emblazoned everywhere on the coffin-table, on the silver scales of the balance, on the garments of these incredible creatures themselves, was the *Aten,* the sacred solar disk, symbol of Ra who is above all.

The embalmer gaped, his whole body trembling like a reed in the wind.

The man behind the balance looked up and saw him. On his head was the pure white crown of Egypt. His countenance was bright, kindly, but firm; perhaps even a little stern as he gazed on the terrified Horemheb.

"Well?" said Osiris....

CHAPTER IX

KHAFRE regarded the left eye of Bast. The perfume and the cat smell were reeking in his nose. The fantastic muzzle almost touched his face, and the woman's hands caressed him tenderly. He watched the unwinking eye. Then he did a bold thing, from his viewpoint an incredibly rash and dangerous act. He reached out and took the big feline head by its two pricked-up ears, and he yanked powerfully upward.

Even at the moment of the action he was not sure that he had interpreted correctly the thing he had seen in the eye socket. But for Ateera and for Thueris and for his pride in himself as a man, he had to attempt the proving of it; or never sleep sound again.

So he tugged heartily on the ears of the goddess, and she gave a queer muffled shriek, and the head came up off her shoulders and suddenly was so light in his hands that he fell back and sideways and sat down hard on the floor of the temple.

Bast's body had turned and was

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streaking away into the shadows, so that between his tumble and the uncertain lighting, he was not sure whether there was any sort of head upon her slim neck now or not. But he held between his hands the giant cat head with the opalescent eyes, and now he turned it upside down and burst into a roar of genuinely amused laughter; for the thing was no more than a mask, made to cover the entire head and quite effective at a distance, as he could attest, but now patently a fraud! He gazed into the thing. It smelled of hide, all right: hides of slain cats that had gone to make up the imitation head. Not really too bad a job, either. He looked at the eyes. They were marvelously wrought—some splendid craftsmanship there—of polychrome glass, transparent from within the mask but iridescently colored when viewed from without, pigmented changeably like a real cat's orbs. Around the back rim of each was attached a strip of thin metal, and to tiny loops in this strip were tied the white linen threads that held eye to mask. The left eye had evidently been bumped or strained in some manner, so that its threads were exposed. He laughed again. The mask was good, very good. It had almost made the masquerade succeed. A framework of some light metal or wood, covered with cat pelts and set upon the shoulders of a woman—behold, the goddess Bast incarnate! He slapped his thighs and shouted happily.

Then a sound, the distant mewing of one of the sacred cats of the temple, recalled him to reality. Ateera was missing, Psamtik was waiting to be brought to justice, and somewhere close at hand the wench who had impersonated Bast was no doubt hiding in fright. He jumped to his feet.

Down an aisle he ran, following the scent of her unguent's strong perfume. It was a trail he could have traced through a jungle. It went back through the sanctuaries and ended at the door of his own quarters. He bit his lip, hesitated, then drew his ivory dagger and went in.

SHE LAY on his sleeping couch, elbows raising her upper torso, head cocked to one side as when she had worn the mask. Already he had decided that her body was in no way to be improved upon; now he saw that her face was equally exquisite. Her skin was a smooth bronze hue, not too dark for beauty in his eyes, nor yet too sallow or coppery. Her black shining hair was cut shorter than the prevailing fashion and lay in curls low over her broad forehead. Her features were finely molded and her eyes were unbelievable: long and almond-shaped in the patrician form of Egypt's aristocracy, outlined with *kohl,* their color was a kind of tawny cream-hue, a fulvous shade that defied analysis. They caught and held Khafre's gaze like those of some great hypnotic snake. Sheathing the dagger, he moved forward slowly, scarcely knowing he moved.

"Who are you?" he asked huskily.

"Sebek-nefru of Bubastis," she told him, her voice low and vaguely sibilant. She had not been imitating a cat's tones in her masquerade. She had been speaking naturally. "Come and sit beside me, Khafre. You revolted at the animal's face, now let me try the woman's."

Unwillingly he came to the couch and stood looking down at her. She turned her face up and slitted her uncanny cream-colored eyes mischievously. "Be seated, Khafre dear," she said quietly. "Here on the edge, at first, if you're afraid of me."

"I am afraid of no mummer such as you," he said.

"Of course not. Sit down. That's

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Holding the blade in his hand he came slowly toward her on the couch.

it. Do you find me repulsive, Khafre?"

Young Khafre stammered a little and then said, "N-no, no indeed."

Sebek-nefru laughed low in her throat. She laid a slim-fingered hand on his bare arm. "I played my part stupidly tonight, did I not? But I found you so desirable, you hard-headed priest, that I allowed emotion to overcome prudence. Oh, well!" she sighed in a faint mockery of sorrow, "you would have found me out sooner or later. Such a silly business it was, anyway...." She propped up one knee and the fine pleated linen fell away, revealed her smooth tan thigh. She looked at it critically.

"No, it doesn't fit a cat somehow, does it, Khafre?"

"No," said he numbly.

"Nor do these arms—" she smoothed her hands over them sensuously—"nor do these. Hmm?"

He shook his head mutely. Her perfume was enveloping him and he felt as though he had been drinking potent wine for days on end. She leaned toward him, laughing. A double strand of big carnelian beads, decorated with gold-foil cats, swung out from her low-necked gown and touched his chest. He reached for her and all at once he froze.

"What is it?" she breathed. Her lips were rich carmine, parted to show white even teeth; the long tawny-cream eyes were half-shut. "Afraid?"

Then he drew back his arms and stood up. He gripped her roughly, impersonally, by the shoulder. Her eyes flew wide. "What is it?"

"Those beads. Those beads with the cats on them." He hauled her off the couch and held her upright with one hand on the back of her neck beneath the short-cut hair. "What have you done with Ateera?" he roared at her.

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She turned her face up and there was a mischievous smile in her eyes . . .

"You devil's brat, what have you done to Ateera?"

She gasped and gurgled under the relentless pressure of his big hand. "I—I never heard of Ateera," she said.

"Horemheb gave those beads to Ateera on her eighteenth birthday!" shouted Khafre. "I allow you the tenth part of a breath to answer me, cat woman: *where is she?*"

SHE LOOKED into the face that had but now been slack and vacant with desire for her; and she said hurriedly and a little sullenly, "I never even saw the girl. Psamtik gave me her beads. He said he had—had gotten rid of her. She was too clever, and—she was a way to repay you for your thickheaded refusal to listen to reason."

He threw her across the couch like a discarded garland of scarlet poppies after a festival. She writhed up and away from him.

"Listen to me," he said coldly and seriously. "You do not know where she is? Is that right?"

"I do not." She was afraid of him now. She could see death in the icy dark eyes.

"Then I tell you this, Sebek-nefru of the magical gaze and the false heart: if harm has come to Ateera I will make very sure that no weapon touches you, and that no man dares to lay a finger on you; but I will pry open your jaws with this ivory knife and you will drink a full brimming measure of pig's milk. Do you believe me?"

Color draining from her face, she whispered, "I believe you, Khafre."

"Good. You can't tell me anything more, eh?"

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Dumbly she shook her head.

"Pig's milk," he repeated cruelly. "You know what will happen then."

She choked and said weakly, "I would—Isis!—I would contract leprosy."

"That's right. It is a medical fact known, I see, even to a false goddess." He went to the door. "I go to seek out Psamtik. You will remain here. If you try to run away, I will find you and do as I promised."

For a long time after he had vanished she crouched at the head of the rumpled bed, her eyes brimming with terror of this strange warrior-priest who could change in a flash from a captured lover to a pitiless man of stone.

She wished she had never heard of Psamtik, nor ever seen the accursed mask of the cat.

CHAPTER X

"WELL," SAID a loud voice. "Well, what's this?"

Horemheb opened his eyes and shut them immediately, as a brilliant lance of light appeared in the darkness.

"I crave pardon for all my sins and it was only out of ignorance that I committed them including blasphemy, but Oh great Osiris if I may but have one more chance I will be the chiefest of your worshipers," he said loudly and all in one breath.

"H o r e m h e b!" said the voice. "What's happened, man?"

The embalmer risked another look. The light was really not so bright as he had thought. It was shed upon him by a torch held in the hand of a Nubian soldier. Ramaos was bending over him, concern writ large on his homely face. "Are you drunk or dying, Horemheb?" he asked.

Horemheb, with the help of his friend's stout grasp, arose from the cold stones of the path and felt himself gingerly all over.

"Is it really you, Ramaos?" he asked fearfully, prodding the soldier in the stomach. "Yes, it's you. Then I suppose I'm still myself, eh?"

"Drunk," said a big Nubian.

"Not drunk," said Horemheb indignantly. "Back from the Underworld." He straightened up and opened his eyes widely. "The Underworld?" he repeated. "Did I say Underworld? Great Isis, yes! There was a glorious sunny place, I suppose it was the Hall of the Two Truths, and there was the balance that weighs a man's soul, and the feather of Truth, and Anubis, and Horus, and Thoth writing down all my sins, and Osiris himself. What a bright and beautiful face he has!"

"Surely my old friend Horemheb is mad," said Ramaos sadly.

"Mad? No," said the embalmer, feeling of his beard to make sure it was on straight. "I was hit on the head—"

"Oh!"

"—By Psamtik, and I went down to the Underworld to be judged. I suppose, since I'm obviously still alive, that it was a dream. Or a vision sent by the gods." Horemheb was still shaken and decidedly not himself. "By holy Hathor! What an experience!" he exclaimed.

"Why did Psamtik hit you?"

"I merely presume it was Psamtik. Either following me or lurking about this place. I was climbing up here thinking about everything—" He clutched Ramaos' sleeve convulsively. "Quick!" he shouted. "No time to lose—down to my embalming establishment!"

"Why?"

"Because Ateera is in deadly danger, may even be dying, may even—come *on!*" he bawled into the soldier's ear. "No time to waste!"

"What about Khafre?" asked

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Ramaos, allowing himself to be hauled briskly down the path.

"He's not the lad to be careless at a time like this. He's all right."

"But Bast—"

"Is a woman with a cleverly conceived false head, or I've guessed wrongly. An accomplice of Psamtik's. If she is, she's not a danger to him; if she isn't, then...."

"What?"

"I never thought to say such a thing in all my life, but—then she's a goddess, and there's nothing any mortal can do to help him if he's offended her."

"Horemheb, you have indeed undergone a violent and astounding change of heart." Ramaos cleared his throat. "Horemheb, old friend, how hard was that blow on the head?"

"Oh, save your breath, you regimented idiot. Hasten, and tell those black warriors of yours to quicken their pace. I tell you Ateera may be dying!"

"But where is she?"

"In the only place we failed to search adequately. In my mummufying rooms, drugged or poisoned or stabbed or—don't talk, man! Hasten! Hasten!"

CHAPTER XI

KHAFRE IN a chill rage had stalked as far as the gateway in the massive facade of the temple before it occurred to him that he was acting doltishly.

In the first place, if he left the precincts of the temple he would be disobeying the orders of his Divine Fathers. Secondly, his friends with many helpers had been looking for Ateera all day, and if they had not found her by this time would assuredly be searching diligently for the rogue Psamtik. What fifty men had not accomplished, he could scarcely rush out impetuously and do single-handed. And then finally he was in the very spot which Psamtik would soon or late be seeking. Sebek-nefru was here. Her partner in guile would come to collogue with her, probably sometime in the night. He turned and went into the great hall once more.

He made a perfunctory obeisance to Thueris' statue as he passed the aisle of pillars at the end of which she sat in stolid composure. He walked to the far end of the central nave where her most important image was upreared before a huge slab of red granite covered with hieroglyphics in gaudy colors, crimson and gold and malachite and the wondrous Egyptian blue that no other country could ever produce. The hieroglyphs told the story of Thueris' life and noble works. The statue in front of them was titanic, more than twice life size. Carven of black basalt, she wore on her breast a sacred scarab of purest gold; her draperies were painted blue, the color of Nut the sky-goddess, her grandmother, and around the hem were carved winged globes and royal asps. She had a serene dignity in this towering representation. Flanked by two seven-foot bronze braziers full of flaming oil was the altar, upon which offerings of food and drink were set in vessels of pottery and fine glass. Khafre knelt to her and after a short prayer from the night ritual he went up the steps and stood beside her, thus placing himself at a point of vantage from which he could see the entire central portion of the hall and much of the pillared remainder. Silently he waited for Psamtik, the priest of the cat.

His left foot began to tingle. It was going to sleep. He had stood motionless for many minutes. He kicked off his sandal, lifted the foot and rubbed it against his right leg. The tingle went away. He tightened

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his sword-belt and moved the blade up and down in its scabbard of leopard skin over sycamore wood, ascertaining that it was not stuck therein. He felt of the ivory knife in his girdle.

Gradually as he waited the years slipped away, and he was the swashbuckling soldier-of-fortune again, the man who had been called The Brand of Ra. His sword had been a flickering thing of light, as swift and pitiless as a shaft of blazing sunlight. Enemies of Egypt had fallen before it like the first sheaves of spring wheat drop from the scythes of the reapers as they lament the necessary death of Isis, who dwells in the grain. *Maa-nehra,* they cry, keening their ritualistic dirge as their brown arms flail the scythes.... No one had wailed above his barbaric foemen, unless it had been their own comrades. Truly Khafre had been The Brand of Ra, The Sword of God, in his free-lancing days!

Impious thoughts crowded his mind, hatred of Psamtik and pictures of the vengeance he would take on him for Ateera's murder. He felt in his heart that the girl was dead. And in a confused way he realized that he had loved her more than he knew, more and in different fashion than he loved his other companions, Horemheb and Ramaos. In a year he might perhaps have married her. She was the daughter of a ka-priest and worthy. And she was lovely, lovely, with strong limbs and slanted eyes of tawny ocher.

He thought of the weird creamy eyeballs of Sebek-nefru. A shiver passed through him. A man desired a sleek strange woman, and in that desire for the first time knew that another girl held his heart in her small and innocent hands. Life was many-faceted and often an incredibly complicated affair. He went back to thinking of how he would carve the skull of Psamtik with his bronze sword.

A FIGURE moved between the two distant columns. He fastened his gaze avidly on the next gap in the rank. It passed across the open space, and he snorted with disgust. Sebek-nefru was at her mummery once more. No more than a shadow, it had still been clearly a great cat's head that he glimpsed.

Obviously the girl was as mad as her partner. What could the continued masquerade gain her but ridicule?

He started, and the sword was half out of its sheath before he realized that it was Sebek-nefru herself who had come quietly to his side. "You startled me," he growled. "How did you get here so quickly—and what have you done with your silly mask?"

"I have been watching you for a long time. My mask?" she said, twisting her head in that odd and (he had to admit it) rather endearing little way she had. "I have not touched it since you pulled it off."

He dismissed the patent falsehood with a shrug. Surely the woman was mad. "Speak softly, cat-wench. I wait for your lover."

She showed her teeth at him. "Psamtik is not my lover. Psamtik loves nothing but gold...and I choose my lovers more carefully than *that,* warrior-priest. Psamtik! Oh, gods!"

"If he isn't your lover, then why did you do his bidding?"

"He promised me a portion of the gain: a quarter of a hundred silver talents by the first year's closing. Who would spurn that, Khafre? Not I!" She laughed. "It would keep me in luxury the rest of my life."

"Poor child," he said, only half thinking of what she had said, "there is more happiness to be found in serving the gods than in a life of pam-

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pered ease."

"Follow your path, priest, and let me alone to follow mine."

"You will follow your path, yes," he said with a touch of savagery. "If Ateera is dead, you will follow it to a leper's grave."

She shrank back against Thueris. Later, when he had almost forgotten her, she said timidly, "I will tell you of Psamtik. He was a priest of Bast at Bubastis, as he said; but he is not a real missionary for her. He disdains all the gods as mere wraiths of imagination. He was expelled from her temple for greed and graft and much dishonesty in the accounting of the revenues. He chose your temple because he heard the Divine Fathers were old and he thought you would make a perfect ally for him, once you had been won over by the appearances of Bast. If I had not blundered in my part," she said bitterly, "he might have done it."

"No, because Psamtik is mad, and could not have fooled me for a long period."

"You are perhaps not so clever as you suppose," said she, "but you are certainly a magnificent figure of a man, Khafre. Will you take me for your sister?" *

"I will marry Ateera," he said. "Speak more quietly, else Psamtik will be warned."

"Ateera? That flat-faced child?"

"She doesn't have a flat face."

"Well, I never saw her, but Psamtik said she was a dish-faced young devil. Khafre," she wheeled, "what can such a provincial virgin teach you of love? Look at me." Khafre did so, somewhat unwillingly. "If you expect to find a better body this side of the tomb, you'll be disappointed. See here—"

"Never mind," he said hastily.

"But inspect my hand, then. Is it not perfection in the realm of hands? See—"

ONLY AN accident saved him from death in that instant. Psamtik, sliding around the great basalt statue from the other side, did not see the small glass bowl of dates set close beside Thueris' feet; it rolled over the edge of the platform and smashed to flinders on the stone of the floor, and Khafre pounced sideways like a startled lion to light a-crouch six feet away. Psamtik stepped down from the altar and advanced cautiously.

Khafre spared one angry glance for the girl. "You traitorous bitch," he said quietly, and then gave his attention to the priest of the cat.

Her wail followed him as he stalked toward the slow-retreating Psamtik. "But I didn't know he was there!" she cried.

Psamtik grinned. "She speaks truth, brother. Coming into the temple, I saw you talking with her and knew that my schemes had gone astray." They crossed blades and jockeyed for position. "When you are dead I will make new plans, brother. There will be other priests elsewhere, more amenable than you to sensible suggestions. She will wear the cat mask again, and we will make our miracles and bask beneath showers of gold while you lie rotting in your sarcophagus."

Khafre had discovered by now that Psamtik was a passable swordsman, though not by any means in his own class. He pretended to fence in the crude Egyptian fashion, saving his Barbarian-taught tricks until he had sucked Psamtik dry of information. "You will never use Sebek-nefru in your plans again. She has fallen in love with me. She will never follow

* *Sister* and *wife, brother* and *husband* were interchangeable in Egyptian speech, sometimes signifying a legal mate, sometimes merely a lover.

—St.R.

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you if you slay me, Psamtik."

"She would do anything for money," said the other confidently.

"You lie!" shrieked the girl from the altar. "Psamtik, you lie in your throat! I renounce you and your crooked paths!"

"The gods smile to hear that, my dear," said Khafre, partly to reward her and partly to annoy Psamtik. "Ah, you nearly had me there, cat's false priest. You're clever with a blade."

"I am accounted an excellent swordsman," said Psamtik, preening. He made a clumsy feint that Khafre might have turned into his last move on earth had he chosen.

"Tell me, what did you do with Ateera?" He held his breath for the answer. Psamtik laughed.

"By now she's as dead as Osiris!" And though Khafre tried to bait him and bring out further news, he could not do it. Psamtik closed his mouth and began to try for the kill.

So at last Khafre said, seeing that he could gain nothing more by dallying, "Cat's priest, you think yourself a splendid fencer, eh?"

"As you know, who already taste death on your tongue."

"Did you ever hear of a swordsman called The Brand of Ra?"

"Certainly. All the Two Lands knew of him in the old days. It was said he died fighting the black savages far to the south."

"He lives, Psamtik. He lives and fights once more, as he did in his wild youth." He unleashed a hurricane attack on the pop-eyed Psamtik. "I am The Brand of Ra, cat's priest. I am the avenger of murdered girls. Look at my eyes, you pretender to holiness. See your death there."

Psamtik gurgled inarticulately and fell back as fast as his feet would take him, his sword making a furiously fast circle before him to keep off that living blade of bronze. He retreated until the first step of the great altar caught him, threw him off balance. He fell and screamed and dropping his weapon clambered up to the feet of Theuris like a fear-maddened beast.

"Come down," said Khafre, waiting. "I won't stain the goddess' robes with your dirty blood."

Psamtik clawed up the idol until he stood on his feet. Darting his eyes hastily about, he moved toward one of the seven-foot braziers. Sebek-nefru, sensing his object, sprang at him like a veritable cat and raked his thin face with her nails. Khafre grinned at that. The wench was not so bad at heart. Truly she must be in love with him, or else the gods had greatly changed her outlook.

Psamtik grasped her by the throat and hurled her off the altar. She fell and did not move. Khafre, roaring, came up the sacred steps after him. Jerking down the tall ornamented brazier, Psamtik, squeaking like a Nile rat, held it horizontally across his chest and with all his strength threw it forward at Khafre. Burning oil flashed and spat around them, running down the stairs, splashing on the floor. Khafre ducked beneath the hurtling metal stand, but uncertain light and great haste caused him to miscalculate its trajectory. It struck him on the temple, hardly more than a grazing blow, yet upon such a sensitive spot that his senses left him before he could put out his hands to break his fall.

Psamtik, breathing hard and quivering with the reaction of his dreadful panic, came slowly down the steps and bent over his enemy. Khafre lay inert. The priest glanced at Sebek-nefru, who was stirring a little and moaning.

He chuckled. Then he picked up his bronze sword and leisurely his

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eyes measured Khafre for the kill.

CHAPTER XII

THE NIGHT was chill, and Ramaos was glad when they arrived at the big rambling quarters of Horemheb's business establishment. It was always warm in the inner rooms, what with pitch boiling and gums and other mysterious ingredients steaming and frothing over hot fires. He had small faith in his friend's sudden theory of Ateera's whereabouts, however. That knock he had been given on the pate had changed him oddly. He would keep talking of various gods, and wondering in a loud voice whether he had seen a vision, had a dream, or actually gone to the world of the dead and returned. Poor Horemheb! A night's rest would likely cure him. Meanwhile, here they were.

"You see now, of course, the point that escaped us all this afternoon," said the embalmer, as he led Ramaos and two of his Nubians through the outer rooms where funerary furniture, coffins, sarcophagi, funeral sleds and a multitude of vases and canopic jars made an amazing litter.

"No," said Ramaos.

"Oh, my dear fellow! Psamtik's sending me that message—it wasn't meant primarily to bring me here, but to get rid of my assistant for a considerable space of time." He straightened his beard automatically. "Have your men wait here. The secrets of my craft are not to be lightly gazed on by curious eyes." They entered the central room, and Ramaos nearly retched at the smells. "You see, he had to have time to bring in Ateera from wherever he'd hidden her, and dispose of her as he'd very cleverly and very devilishly planned. So he sent my assistant to the temple on a bootless errand, and everything followed after as he knew it likely would. All my other men were working at a tomb up near Sekht's home, a little beyond his old tomb. Psamtik was alone here. If I hadn't been methodical enough to go over the town house by house in my mind, I'd never have bethought myself that after all we hadn't looked in this, the most obvious place of all. Very clever of the man, really."

"Ateera is—*here?*" asked Psamtik fearfully. He stared about him. The major workroom of the embalmer was like an antechamber of hell. Even at this late hour Horemheb's assistant was working, moving quickly here and there in his tight black cap, naked chest streaming sweat. A number of kinds of incense were being tested, cones of them fuming on various little trays. Multishaped utensils held gums and bitumen and salt; pots of embalming honey stood clotting in corners; filthy rags lay about in profusion; the reek of natron was heavy, and strange exotic spices shot the atmosphere with trails of cloying sweetness. Smoke and vapor of a dozen different densities and colors fouled the air. And filling one end of the room was a tremendous open furnace, which, although its flames were partially extinguished at the moment, was still adding its portion of dismally sooty smoke to the whole effect.

"Isis!" gasped Ramaos, and tried not to breathe. He looked around once more. A mummy lay on a rough table at one side; as it had not yet been dipped in the gum bath, the linen bandages were as white and fresh as was possible for anything in this inferno.

"You think Ateera—is *here* somewhere?" repeated the soldier.

"Where else could she be, Ramaos?" asked Horemheb dismally.

"But where is she, then, in Ra's name?"

The embalmer walked slowly over

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to the banked furnace. He took a long rod of blackened metal and leaning over stirred the ashes and the half-burnt logs. His face was woeful as a bereaved mother's.

"Oh, no!" cried Ramaos. "No! Not even a madman!"

Horemheb laid the poker down and returned, laying a hand on his friend's shoulder. "There are bones in it," he said. "By the gods of the Ennead I swear..." but he could not finish the oath.

Ramaos looked wildly about him. "I will not believe it. No, not even the insane Psamtik could cremate such a beautiful child as Ateera."

"Where else is there?" asked Horemheb despondently. "Before we arrived I had hopes of finding numerous places where one could hide a body, or a drugged girl. But now that I see it, where is there?"

"The sarcophagi. The coffins!" Ramaos was inspired.

THEY BURST together into the next room and began a search through the great coffins. But in ten minutes they met in the center and stared hopelessly at each other.

"Ramaos?"

"Empty."

"Let us go up to Khafre. I have seen the bones...."

"Yes, he'll need us." Then the soldier's jaw dropped and he swung round with a final idea showing plain in his long homely face.

"Horemheb—the mummy!"

"Oh, no, not that."

But the embalmer led him back into the smoke-clogged workroom. Curiously the bare-chested assistant joined them as they bent over the linen-swatched form of the mummy.

"What is it, sir?"

"Is that my work?" asked Horemheb fearfully. "I can't be sure. I don't think it is, but between that knock on the head and all the worry, I'm not sure of anything. Did I wrap this, did I?"

The burly young man leaned down and twitched the wrappings with professional interest. "No, sir, though I saw you do it, I take oath to Osiris these aren't your turns. No, sir. Somebody's done it over. Not a real embalmer, either. This is an amateur's job—oh, neat, I give him that, but not really fine work, and certainly not yours sir." He stepped back.

Horemheb hesitated only a moment. Then, "Give me your knife," he said huskily.

Cautiously, yet with speed, he slit the bandages at the top of the head and in other places over the face. Deft fingers pulled them aside, unrolled others, and in the space of twenty breaths had exposed, not the rightful head of a mummy, wizened and bleak from its seventy days in the bath of natron, but the beautiful calm face of the ka-priest's daughter, Ateera.

"Is she alive?" asked Ramaos.

He did not answer, but stripped off more layers of the newly-woven linen, bringing to light her throat, the slope of her breasts. Then he bent down and laid his ear to her heart.

He remained thus for so long that Ramaos thought he would grow old and die before Horemheb ever rose again.

CHAPTER XIII

PSAMTIK measured Khafre for the kill. He decided to lop off his head. It was the surest way. Men sometimes lived with ghastly wounds in their bodies, and this was the famous Brand of Ra—turned priest, true, but still a man compact of energy and vitality, as he had seen tonight. Yes, beheading was the safest method of disposal.

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He raised his sword above his head, and *it was caught and held there.*

Psamtik gave a scream of panic. He writhed about, still holding the hilt, and saw a woman with a cat's head standing almost toe to toe with him, her great chatoyant eyes blazing at him uncannily. He nearly sobbed with releif.

"Sebek-nefru! What are you doing, you fool? Let me kill this man and our secret's safe. Release the blade!"

The woman's hand gripped his sword a foot from the point. He would teach the jade a lesson, by Isis! He gave a brisk upward jerk at the weapon. It should have sliced through the tendons of her hand like a knife through a tender roasted duck; but instead the quick effort nearly threw his right arm out of joint. It was as though he were heaving at a sword whose point was buried in granite. In consternation he let go the hilt and stepped back to stand over Khafre's prostrate form.

"Sebek-nefru," he said shakily. "Sebek-nefru, how—"

The enormous eyes that were burning into the core of his soul lidded themselves briefly, and the tip of a pink tongue shot out and licked the whiskery chops.

"What are you doing with your mask on at a time like this?" he demanded. "And how...oh, gods!" he shrieked, and with a convulsive movement making as if to move further from her hybrid form, fell over Khafre's body and lit on the floor with a bone-shaking crash. Like a crab he edged away on his elbows and heels, giving little feeble cries of fear. "How did you close your eyes?" he managed to ask, as he saw she was not following him. "How—Ra preserve me!—how could you put out a tongue?"

The great cat face grinned. The sword clattered on the stone and the hand pointed beyond him. He risked a glance over his shoulder and saw Sebek-nefru just raising her head from the floor.

Psamtik, who had always been more than a little crack-brained on a few subjects such as wealth and power and his own importance, now began to grow truly mad.

He scuttled away until he had put a dozen yards between himself and the hybrid horror that he could not understand, and then he leaped to his feet and raced for the front gateway, gurgling with frenzy. He risked a swift look back. She had vanished. He turned his head again and saw that he was running straight into her arms. His scream rattled off the pillars and echoed away fantastically into the recesses of the building.

Back toward the unconscious Khafre and the sick-and-sorry Sebek-nefru he ran, spittle flying from his whitened lips. A form was bending low over the priest of Thueris. He swerved to avoid it and it rose up with a quiet laugh to show him a gray face and long iridescent eyes. He emitted the loudest of his cries, tripped, fell on his face, rolled madly over and got up to dash for the black basalt statue of the hippo goddess.

"Thueris!" he called, clutching her cold arms. "Thueris, aid me!" His voice was cracked and hoarsening from the terrible strain of his shriekings. "I'll serve you every minute of my life! I'll get you converts—votive offerings—gold—"

A SLIM HAND touched him on the shoulder, and a breath was in his nostrils that smelled of sweet milk. He did not look around. He vaulted off the altar in a passion of despair. He could literally feel his brain tearing asunder beneath the repeated attacks of this insupportable

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terror. He began to whimper.

He made for a side aisle, hoping it led eventually to the open. She was there, standing calmly between two hieroglyphed columns and smoothing her whiskers with a terribly long tongue. She was everywhere. She was omnipotent.

Isis and Ra and Anubis defend the poor sinner! *She was Bast!*

Now he lost what had remained of his wits, and with his linen robes flying and his black eyes bulging like thumb-squeezed grapes he fled from this thing he could not comprehend.

A poor panicked mouse, lashed and goaded by fear too great to be borne, he ran squeaking from the cat; and wherever he went he found her waiting.

At last he cowered in the central aisle, exhausted, bewildered, and utterly insane.

And so it was that Khafre found him when he had revived from the blow on his forehead.

"Psamtik!" he said, touching the shaking bundle that had been a man. "What under the heavens—Psamtik?"

"He has suffered the result of his own blasphemies," said someone behind the priest. "And now you must kill him, servant of Thueris."

Khafre turned. The cat-headed woman repeated, "You must kill him."

"Sebek-nefru?"

"No, but the goddess Bast, come out of Bubastis to avenge the defiling of her name," said Sebek-nefru quietly. She stood beside the other and she did not appear to be afraid. "And I think that I too must die to cleanse her honor."

Khafre stared at the cat mask. His brain was still misted with the vapors of his unconsciousness. He was not in the least frightened, although he knew that this was surely more than another mortal masquerade; and he did not understand why he should not be afraid.

"There is terror in the gods only for those who have reviled and insulted them, who sin against them in full knowledge of their crime." Bast's voice was a little like the purr of Sebek-nefru herself. She lidded her eyes momentarily and spoke again. "The girl need not die. She was only foolish, only greedy. That man is a dead man, though, because everything he ever did in his life was a blasphemy against the gods, against decency and reverence. Slay him, Khafre, priest of Thueris."

Khafre looked at the drooling Psamtik. "I can't kill an idiot," he said.

"You must."

He stood tall and stern. "The Brand of Ra is no butcher to be told, This is a cow for the slaughter, That is a man you must kill. I am a priest and a warrior. I do no one's dirty work. No, not even yours, sacred cat of Bubastis."

She regarded him thoughtfully. Her feline face was mobile and he could see the thoughts in play across it. Her great shining eyes peered into his own dark ones, and she said admiringly, "By my father Ra, but this is a man!"

"And not a butcher," added Khafre, just in case she was still in doubt of his decision.

"No, no. Not a hireling, I see. And not a man who is obsessed with his own inferiority, as are most of those who whine and grovel at my feet day by day and night by night. You are a man I could raise to a place beside me, you priest and swordsman."

Khafre passed a hand over his bloody forehead and thought weakly, Oh gods, but how many females will tell me they'd like to mate with me in the course of this one night? Now

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it's a goddess.

SENSING his thought, she said, "The life of a goddess is lonely, Khafre, if she finds no one to share it with her. I am a young goddess, with centuries of worship and honor ahead before I must go down to oblivion in the Underworld. Created in the brains and spawned from the desire of men who craved for something to venerate, I am more woman than beast. I shall take many lovers in my time, Khafre, and you could be the first."

Sebek-nefru, too humble by this time to be jealous of the goddess who was tempting the man she loved, said, "What of Psamtik?"

"Yes, Psamtik. It is right that you refuse to slay him," murmured the cat-headed hybrid. "It was against me that he sinned in the light of knowledge, not against you, Khafre. I will finish him."

She went to Psamtik with a gliding, feline motion, and lifted him up to look into his crazed eyes. Deep within him a coal of sanity still burned, for his dripping mouth gave forth a cry of fright. She pointed to the doorway at the end of the hall. He tore himself from her grasp and fled, moaning, into the night. The three stood silent. In a moment there was a long agonized scream. It shut off, and a bird called sleepily in the stillness.

"What happened?" asked Khafre.

"He has thrown himself into the Nile," replied Bast complacently; and now for the first time Khafre was afraid of her.

"I will not harm you, priest of Thueris, nor will I touch this woman who played at being a deity. Her loss shall be her punishment, for *you* will belong to me." She came toward him.

"I cry mercy for Khafre in the name of Thueris, whose temple you stand in," said Sebek-nefru on an impulse. "You would not take the priest of another goddess, Bast?"

The uncanny eyes flicked over her. "I have no quarrel with my sister Thueris. The claims of love come before those of duty, even among the gods, Sebek-nefru. Thueris will give up her priest."

"I won't leave the temple," said Khafre valiantly.

"I command you to desire me," said Bast in a very low voice, and her tongue touched her black underlip softly. "If you will not come as a willing lover, swordsman, you must come as a slave. But only at first, only at first. You will find me so pleasing that before the first night is done you will never crave for anything but the companionship and the love of Bast of Bubastis."

Khafre struggled within himself against the power of the goddess. He shut his eyes to obliterate the sight of the body with its beautiful limbs like soft ivory, the furred gray mask of the cat that was suddenly preferable in his sight to any ordinary-looking and undesirable human face. Yet the mischief was done. He had looked into Bast's eyes, and there was nothing in the universe to content him save her. He lifted his lids again. His surroundings blurred, his memory faded, and he knew only that his desire was Bast. He moved toward her, and to the horrified Sebek-nefru it was like seeing a wooden doll jerked forward by strings.

"No, Khafre, no!" she shrilled.

Bast gestured. Sebek-nefru's lifted hands slumped to her sides, and she bowed her lovely head mutely on her breast. Khafre walked forward. Bast of Bubastis put out her arms with a cat's contented grin.

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CHAPTER XIV

"RELEASE HIM, goddess," said a man in the shadow of the pillars. "Give him his mind again." Horemheb came into the light, walking slowly and painfully, for he was very tired.

Bast halted Khafre with a light touch on the chest. "Do you command me, you aging embalmer?" she asked quietly.

"Yes. I command you."

"By whose right?" she asked, smiling her cat's amused smile. "By the right of Osiris, with whom you spoke in the Hall of the Two Truths? By the right of my father Ra?"

"No, by the right of mortal man, Bast, without whose like you would never have been born. Release my friend Khafre, and go your ways."

Now she was suddenly all feline, covetous and supremely selfish, her mouth wide and angry. She spat the words at him. "You dare, embalmer? You would step between me and my desire?"

"Yes," said Horemheb wearily, "I would. For this man who is my friend, and for you yourself, Bast."

She was startled. "For *my* sake?"

"Perhaps more than for his, because I feel sorry for you in your eternal round of life that will always be the same thing day after day.... Yes, you can bewitch him. You have powers I shudder to comtemplate. But in the end you would see disillusion and sadness in his eyes, and a healthy disgust for your hybridness. Could you look on that with satisfaction, Bast?"

"I would satisfy him as no mortal ever could!" she said proudly.

Horemheb gazed at her and fingered his little false beard. "Perhaps...physically. But the difference in breed is too great. You could take him as an automaton, a living doll to sport with. Yet finally you would need some return from him that didn't generate in your own magical powers, and you'd find it was not to be had. Think of that, Bast. If you wanted a mere lover, you could have any well-set-up lad in the Two Lands; but you want Khafre for his valiant personality—which you cannot have save in artificial fashion."

The strange deity tugged at one ear thoughtfully. The similarity to Horemheb's habitual gesture with his beard might under other circumstances have been laughable. "You are no fool, embalmer," she said.

"My plea is for you as well as for Khafre, Bast of Bubastis. You see it now. I feel nothing for you but compassion."

"Father Ra! That a man must pity a goddess!" Her purr was satiric.

"Yes, I pity you. I remember the first law of the world, which is that like seeks like through all eternity. I council you to lay your feminine snares for some stray god or other, sacred cat; for I remind you again that man goes to woman, beast to beast, god to goddess at the last. Each to his kind forever."

"By my whiskers, but you have learnt wisdom in your travels, embalmer!" said she, a little sadly, a little wistfully. "Very well. I give you back your swordsman-priest whole and unharmed. He fought my enemies very gallantly, and I reward him with his life, which I also hold dear," she said, staring at Horemheb as if daring him to argue with that. "Waken, Khafre."

Khafre shook his head and blinked. "Horemheb! When did you arrive?"

"Just now, son. You entertain queer visitors tonight."

"This is Bast of Bubastis, a goddess of some power."

"A little power, a little," said the cat-woman with another grin. "My

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business here is done. I will return to the city that gave me birth, because there are other cynics and greedy blasphemers there who need a lesson or two. And Khafre—"

"Yes, my goddess?" he said, bowing with reverence.

"It will really not be necessary to re-dedicate this temple, for Thueris and I get along well together, and the whole thing was Psamtik's idea; but if you were ever given a leave to travel, and came to Bubastis and laid a small offering on my altar, I am sure no one would take it amiss."

"No one could take offense at such a gesture of piety," agreed Horemheb. "And now, if it won't be too disrespectful, I'd like to sit down. The slope of that hill nearly killed me this time."

BAST SMILED at him. She gazed a moment at Khafre, and because he did not remember anything of her attempt to entice him away, he was bewildered by her expression of sorrow. Then, quite abruptly, without a word of farewell, she vanished; and the air rushed together in the place where she had stood and made an odd small sound like distant thunder.

Horemheb sat down on a bench and sighed. "I was wondering how she'd take her leave. Quite impressive, I admit."

Khafre collapsed beside him. "Surely Egypt is returning to her former glories," he said, "for the gods begin to walk among us again. A sure sign of prosperity, Horemheb."

"Well, I wouldn't know. Bast struck me as a lady with a mind of her own, and good times or bad, I should not care to try to prevent her strolling about as she pleased. By Isis!" he exclaimed, shaking his head. "In the morning I will undoubtedly give you a long and logical explanation for the whole affair, but tonight I stand in awe of this creature who has shattered the beliefs and prejudices of a lifetime."

Sebek-nefru touched the priest on the shoulder. "I am glad you are well, Khafre. I was afraid when Psamtik struck you with the brazier...."

"I am well. Horemheb," he said, turning to the embalmer, "what of Ateera? Have you found her?"

Sebek-nefru stepped back a pace. He did not look around at her. With a set expression she began to undo the clasp of the carnelian beads.

Horemheb said, "She should be here in a moment; Ramaos halted with her to rest on the way up here. She isn't too strong yet, but she insisted on coming to see you. We sent Nubians to her father's with the news."

"Then she is alive!" he cried joyously.

"Yes, yes. I'll tell you the story. Don't beat me like that! These old bones won't stand much more. Control your glee, curse you. Psamtik drugged her while they sat by the lotus pool. The drug was in something he gave her to eat, a tidbit, he said, out of Syria. She felt herself fainting and feared it was poppy juice, but as she's still alive, it must have been some esoteric concoction that drugs but does not kill."

"The swineherd!" growled Khafre, clenching his fists.

"Well, she knew in a vague sort of way that he was leading her by unfrequented alleys into the town, and she remembers sitting in a daze behind a bush near my house; then everything went dark for her. We know now that he took her inside, threw a mummy on which I was working into my furnace, and ghoulishly wrapped her up to simulate it. If it hadn't occurred to me that she might have been taken to the embalming

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rooms, by now she'd have been dipped in gum and dead as Sesostris."

"She was bound as a mummy? And survived?"

"He wrapped her head thinly. I think perhaps he was interrupted by my coming, and had to get out quickly. I think he meant to finish the wrapping and let her suffocate. He had a sadistic twist to his mind. It must have pleased his devilish sense of humor, to picture us dipping her in gum and burying her for someone else."

"I felt sorry for the way he died," said Khafre bitterly, "but now I am happy that it was so horrible."

"If ever a man deserved a nasty demise, he was that man."

THEY SAT silently for a space, thinking of Psamtik and of the goddess he had called into the mortal world by the vicious and sacrilegious deeds he had done in her name. At last Ramaos came into the temple, Ateera on his arm.

Khafre ran to her side and they stood looking into one another's eyes. Khafre found himself dumb, lacking words to tell her of the love he had discovered; then he realized it was not necessary to say anything. He embraced her gently and with a glad cry she kissed him on the mouth.

"Sekht will lose a daughter before the harvest comes," said Horemheb to Ramaos. "And we will lose a comrade, for he'll be so changed we won't recognize him. It happens thus when a fine young fellow gets married."

"Horemheb, you are a complete cynic."

"Perhaps so. Ramaos, I have much to tell you, and I'd better do it tonight. Tomorrow I will not believe any of it. Tonight, having seen great wonders, I believe; and I am humble in the knowledge of my former ignorance. Tomorrow—tomorrow I shall most likely awake to grave doubts and the old material view of the world will come creeping back into my brain. I think I am too set in my ways for even a goddess to change me."

He linked arms with the soldier and they left the hall, Horemheb busily expounding his theories of the recent events and pulling at his metal beard. Khafre and Ateera had sunk down on the bench and were deep in incoherent love-talk, when the girl's eyes fell upon the necklace of beads with their cats in gold-foil. She snatched it up with a glad cry,

"Khafre, my good-luck jewels! and for a second he caught the scent even missed them!"

He looked at the carnelian ornament Where did you find them? I had not of Sebek-nefru's heady perfume, that clung to the strands like a dying memory. Glancing up into Ateera's delighted eyes, he seemed to see not the tawny ocher hue of her irises, but the fulvous creamy *kohl*-shaded eyes of the cat-girl of Bubastis.

She must have gone silently, leaving the beads here as a final proof of her reformation. For a moment he felt a pang of sorrow at the thought that he should not see her again. . .perhaps even a little regret that she had changed, for there had been something attractive about her lack of morals, her lovely lawlessness.

Then Ateera asked him to fix the clasp about her throat, and he forgot the eyes of Sebek-nefru.

Whether he would remember them later was a problem that did not concern him at all.

THE END

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THE OUTER EDGES . . .

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

NO MATTER what the talk is of "high powered science", the universe is still full of mysteries, mysteries which are only slowly being resolved. This is particularly true in astronomy. Every now and then somebody pops up with the idea that we've pretty well catalogued the astronomical universe and that we can sit back and relax. How wrong they are!

A case in point is the furor over that grim circler of the outer edges of the Solar System, the forelorn, the foreboding planet Pluto. Ever since this shy inhabitant of the system was discovered not so many years ago, astronomers have been studying it with moderate interest, an interest decreased by the fact that they simply didn't have the equipment to do the job. So Pluto was neatly catalogued and forgotten about.

But the two-hundred incher, the Hale telescope is delivering the goods in quantity these days. And it has come up with some surprising information. Hitherto astronomers thought Pluto a planet about the size of the Earth. This turns out to be all wrong. It's about *half* the size according to the Mount Palomar giant!

And that little fact throws a monkey wrench into the works, for a planet of such a small size would have to have a density ten times that of the Earth in order to account for the perturbations of Neptune's orbit. Such density is out of the question.

What then is causing the variations in Neptune's orbit?

Nobody knows of course and nobody ventures a guess though a few hardy souls suspect that there may be a trans-Plutonian planet goofing up the works somewhere out in space. Diligent telescopic and spectroscopic investigation has failed to confirm this hypothesis. But something's out there, that's for certain!

★ ★ ★

FOTO-FOOLER . . .

★ By JON BARRY ★

IF YOU amateur camera fans think you have trouble snapping something listen to the problems confronting the physicists who try to "photograph" high-speed atomic particles. Ordinary film won't do the job, not because it isn't sensitive enough but mainly because it's too thin! A sensitized film trying to detect a reaction of a cosmic ray shattering an atom is really working hard. The particle is through the thin film before the picture impresses itself!

In order to conquer this objection, such film is constructed in thicknesses of a quarter of an inch or a half. Thus there is chance for the atoms of sensitized dye to be affected before the reaction has ceased. Events like these occur in fractions of a micro-second unlike in ordinary photography.

In astronomy too, photographers encounter tough problems. Because the film must be perfectly flat invariably it is in the form of a glass plate. Subsequent micrometer measurements made on such a plate are accurate because the dimensions can't change as in paper film. Sometimes the plates are curved to conform to a given focal curvature. Next time you shoot with that camera thank your stars you aren't doing *really* delicate work!

SCHMIDT'S SPIRIT

★ By L. A. BURT ★

IT IS NOT often that a man leaves a monument to himself, so eloquent and yet so silent that it is the greatest tribute his fellow humans can conceive. But Bernhard Schmidt, the humble, hard-working, self-trained optician who created the marvelous Schmidt telescope, has a superb testimonial to his genius. Amidst the equipment which consorts with the two hundred inch telescope, is another piece of apparatus, the world-famed Schmidt telescope. This wonderful instrument, no less important to the progress of astronomy is as sheer a product of genius as a Beethoven symphony.

Schmidt, during his lifetime, was little recognized. But the physical and astronomical worlds have seized on his invention which permits observing enormous areas of the sky at one stroke, and built dozens of tools. The Schmidt telescope is as much a camera as a 'scope. It is finding uses everywhere. Projection systems for television use it. Photographic schemes use it. Astronomy and science in general finds it an invaluable tool.

If the spirit of Schmidt is hovering somewhere in the illimitable reaches of the universe, it must look down on our little Earth, smilingly. It has monuments to its greatness everywhere!

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TINK TAKES OVER

By P. F. Costello

Terrence wanted a job badly, and it seemed that the leprechaun was going to get him one—even if it killed him! . . .

He found himself suddenly propelled forward toward the waiting bandit . . .

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TERRENCE O'REILLY put his arm about the girl's waist as they strolled along the edge of the park.

"Ah, the night is glorious," he said. "I wish—"

The girl stopped abruptly and pushed his arm down.

"Now there you go again, Terrence!" she said.

Terrence sighed and ran a hand through his thick black hair.

"It's just a manner of speaking," he said. "A habit, as you well know."

The girl whose name was Carol Lee, and who was slim, red-haired and lovely, stamped a neatly shod foot in annoyance.

"A grown man shouldn't be in the habit of wishing for everything like a mooning child. My father says you should get your head out of the clouds."

Terrence sighed. "Wouldn't it be pleasant to get through an evening without once quoting your father on the subject of my unworthiness and general debility?"

"Father's right," Carol said, heatedly. "Everything about you is just too—*vague*. You *wish* you had a million dollars, and you *wish* we could

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get married, and *wish* you had a job—" She faced him with storm signals flying in her deep blue eyes. "You're always wishing for something to happen, but you never try to *make* it happen."

"Well, there are enough practical people in the world," Terrence said defensively. "I have imagination and vision, and what's the harm in that?"

"The harm is that you're an idler and a wisher. We've been engaged two years now during which time you've done nothing to help us get married. Professionally you're travelling nowhere at amazing speed."

"You're going too far," Terrence said ominously. "I realize you've inherited your father's petty and unfortunate temper, but you can't use it on me with impunity."

"Oh, is that so! Well let me tell you..."

After two or three more heated exchanges the young man and the young woman strode angrily off in opposite directions.

* * *

"What a pity! They seem like nice people."

"Bah! A pair of dopes."

Tink and Nastee, city-dwelling Leprechauns, were seated on the arm of a park bench, enjoying the early evening breezes. Tink looked after the swiftly retreating figure of Terrence O'Reilly with a sympathetic gleam in his eye.

"You're wrong as usual, Nastee," he said. "All that young man needs is a push in the right direction."

"You'll drown in the milk of human kindness one of these days," Nastee said, and his expression made it clear that such a development would delight him immensely.

Tink looked thoughful. "I think I'll give him a push," he said.

"He'll fall on his face."

"We'll see about that."

"*I'll* see about that," Nastee said.

"Oh!" Tink glanced at Nastee with a challenging smile. "You're going to undo my good work, eh?"

"Why, naturally."

Tink's laugh bubbled up merrily and caused a passing policeman to raise his eyebrows in astonishment. The policeman, whose name was Clancy, hadn't heard a sound like that since he'd left Donnegal as a boy fifty years ago. He listened hopefully for a moment or so, and then walked on, shaking his graying head, and dreaming of games he'd played on a green lawn beside his father's cottage...

"You'll never learn, Nastee," Tink said, leaping to the ground. "Good always wins out over bad, you know."

"Horsefeathers," Nastee said rudely...

THE NEXT morning Terrence O'Reilly awoke with the elusive feeling that he'd had a bad dream whose details he couldn't remember. Then he recalled his fight with Carol and realized gloomily that it was no bad dream that accounted for his depression.

He climbed out of bed, went through his rather strenuous morning exercises listlessly, then showered, shaved and went downstairs for breakfast.

His landlady, Nora McGlinchley, met him at the door of the dining room.

"You're recalling that matter we discussed last week?" she said pointedly.

Terrence gave her his broadest smile. "I've thought of very little else, Nora, except the wonders of your cooking and the cuteness of your dimples."

Miss Nora, who was on the unfortunate side of forty, stiffened herself against this broadside of Irish charm.

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"Well, have you reached a decision? You know this isn't a Red Cross Shelter I'm running here. I must pay my bills like everyone else, and if my roomers don't pay me, then what am I to do?"

"To be truthful with you, Nora, I've got a little deal in the fire that's going to solve all my problems. If you could just exercise a wee bit of your saintly patience—"

"I've heard that before. But I don't want to be harsh with you. I'll wait another week. Now get your breakfast before it gets cold."

"Ah, that's my girl."...

Terrence consumed his usual modest breakfast of grapefruit, ham and eggs, toast, jam, and muffins, and then settled back with his cup of coffee to peruse the morning paper. But an odd thing happened then. His hand trembled mysteriously and coffee sloshed into the saucer.

"Well, I'm damned!" he cried.

Normally his nerves were like rock; but he felt as if something had *pushed* his hand. That was an idiotic idea of course.

He put the paper down and set the cup on it while he dabbed at his spattered tie with his napkin. Then he picked up the cup and prepared again to read his paper.

He found himself staring at the Help-Wanted columns, which was hardly his choice of pleasant reading. And he noticed that the damp bottom of the cup had neatly ringed one particular ad.

"Well," he said. His curiosity was caught by this coincidence so he read the ad.

It said:

Wanted: young, intelligent, resourceful man for interesting, remunerative managerial position. Excellent future prospects for right man. Apply in person to Mr. Carruthers, Savoy Hotel.

"Glory be, Mr. Carruthers is practically begging for me," Terrence said aloud.

He was caught by the curious chain of circumstances that had brought this Heaven-sent opportunity to his attention. If his hand hadn't wavered so inexplicably, and if he hadn't put the cup down in exactly the spot he had—why he might never have seen the ad at all!

A powerful believer in all sorts of astral intervention in the affairs of men, Terrence felt certain that some Power had decided to do him the favor of managing his affairs.

And so, with a confident cheery smile, he grabbed his hat, and with the morning paper under his arm, went out to hail a cab...

"OH, VERY clever of you, I'm sure."

"Well, it worked."

Tink was seated on the radiator cap of Terrence's speeding cab. He was smiling and swinging his legs contentedly.

"Pretty old stuff," Nastee said derisively. "Jiggling his hand like that and steering the cup onto the right ad."

"I repeat, it worked."

Nastee laughed suddenly. "There's many a slip twixt you-know-what and y o u-k n o w-w h a t. Don't be so cocky..."

* * *

Mr. Carruthers was a tall, powerfully built man, with graying hair and keen eyes. He took Terrence's measure with a swift appraising glance and decided he liked what he saw. Terrence was even bigger than he was, and his handshake was impressive and his countenance was frank and honest.

After Terrence had told him about his schooling, and his war record, Mr. Carruthers said: "That all sounds excellent, Mr. O'Reilly. Now here's

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what I have in mind. I represent the Tidal Rubber Company, of which you may have heard. We need a manager for our branch in Malaya. The technical requirements for the job aren't too important. They can be learned. What we need and must have though, is a fearless man, a man without nerves. Do you understand?"

Terrence thrust out his chin. "Indeed I do, sir."

"Fine. You see, we've had trouble with the natives down there, and trouble with the government. Our last manager couldn't take it. Went to pieces. Pressure got him."

Terrence permitted himself a sympathetic shake of the head for this example of lesser clay.

"Are you married?" Carruthers asked irrelevantly.

"No—although I've plans."

"Good. It's a lonely life, you know. And a good woman—" Carruthers rubbed his nose and said, "You see my point."

"Oh, perfectly," Terrence said.

"You'll have to be an absolute tower of strength, believe me. A rock. You'll have to bear yourself with dignity and courage at all times. You'll—"

Mr. Carruthers broke off as Terrence suddenly slapped himself on the cheek.

"Must be a fly," Terrence said. He looked about the air above him with a puzzled expression.

"Perhaps," Mr. Carruthers said, after a significant pause. "However, to come back to the matter at hand. I feel—"

Terrence slapped his other cheek. "Something kicked my ear," he said in an angry voice.

"S o m e t h i n g—er—kicked your ear?"

"Yes!"

"The fly, perhaps?" Mr. Carruthers asked the question gently.

"No, it must have been bigger than a fly," Terrence said.

"I see." Mr. Carruthers cleared his throat and looked earnestly at Terrence. Suddenly he squinted and leaned forward slightly in his chair. "I say, your cheek is twitching."

"I know it is," Terrence said plaintively. He slapped at his cheek several times. "Nothing there," he said. with a hollow laugh.

"Perhaps, if you'd leave us your phone number," Mr. Carruthers said, rising.

He took Terrence by the elbow and led him to the door.

Outside in the corridor Terrence heard the door click behind him with finality, and with a desolate but puzzled expression, he walked heavily to the elevators...

* * *

Nastee's laugh was a yodel of glee.

"You'd better give up, Tink," he said.

"I will not. I'll help him out now if it's the last thing I do."

They were at their accustomed park bench, and Nastee was performing ecstatic pirouettes on the iron filigree.

"Did you see him slapping his cheek?" he cried out in delight.

"Yes, I saw him," Tink said.

"All I did was kick him with my heel."

Tink suddenly swung down to the ground.

"Hey, where you going?"

"Remember, there are three points to a triangle," Tink said mysteriously and flashed away down the path...

"YOU HAD another quarrel with that loafer, Terrence O'Reilly, didn't you?"

"Yes, Daddy," Carol said. "Is it as obvious as all that?"

Carol's father put his paper down with a deliberate gesture. "No, it required very astute deductions. I no-

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ticed first that you've apparently been crying most of the night. Secondly, your behavior during breakfast would make that of a Trappist monk seem mad and uncontrolled by comparison. Thirdly, you've been sighing like a leaky calliope every time you glance at his stupid picture on the mantel, and so, with brilliant logic, I decided you had a quarrel."

"You're right, of course."

Mr. Lee removed his glasses, which gave his face the appearance of a denuded persimmon, and pointed a stern forefinger at his daughter.

"Terrence O'Reilly is a lazy, idling romantic," he said in precise accents.

"But I love him."

"Bah! Of all the ridiculous, insane comments I've ever—"

"He's right. He said you had a petty temper."

Mr. Lee put his glasses back on and peered closely at his daughter. "Nonsense!" he shouted.

"You see? Now you're shouting at me."

Carol suddenly rose and ran around the table and put her arms about her father's neck. "Don't be angry with me," she said. "I do love him, and I can't help it."

Mr. Lee looked sour for a moment, but finally he sighed and said, "Oh, all right. What do you want me to do?"

"Couldn't you find a place for him in the bank?"

"My dear, you say the most preposterous things!"

"Why? He's honest and he's strong."

"We are not hiring dray horses."

"Oh, daddy!"

Carol rubbed her cheek against her father's and he sighed and shook his head after a moment. "Very well, my dear. Call him and ask him to do me the honor of stopping by at his convenience. I'll talk with him. . . ."

A tinkling sunny laugh sounded surprisingly. Carol looked at her father with a puzzled smile. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes. It was probably wind against the window panes," said Mr. Lee, who was never at a loss for an answer.

MR. LEE and Terrence met that afternoon in the board room of the Exchange National Bank.

"My daughter tells me you are still looking for a job," Mr. Lee said. He stressed the word "still" faintly, and got across the impression that Terrence had been unemployed since at least the start of the Punic Wars.

"I've had miserable luck," Terrence said. He was still unnerved by his experience of the morning with Mr. Carruthers.

"Yes, I'm sure," Mr. Lee said, with total disbelief in his tone. "What kind of a job do you want?"

"Anything at all. Anything that's fitting, you understand."

"Oh, I see. Do you think we might persuade you to start off as, say, a vice-president?"

Terrence laughed good-naturedly. He lit a cigarette with an expansive gesture. "That would be an excellent place to start, I'm sure."

"Yes, you'd have room for advancement," Mr. Lee said. He paused a moment, studying the shining mahogany surface of the board table. Then he said: "I am a vice president of this Bank. I've held my present title thirteen years, before which I was respectively, a cashier, a secretary, a teller, and office boy. With great deal of hard work, plus certain intellectual endowments, I've got as far as I have in my profession. Are you willing to take the same chance, put in the same hard work over the years?"

"Well, now," Terrence said, uneasily.

"I thought so. For some reason

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which escapes me completely, my daughter finds herself in love with you, Mr. O'Reilly. You know of this —er—aberration, I presume."

"Oh, certainly." Terrence smiled with the grace of an Irish King. "I love her too, you know."

"That's going to make it nice for both of you," Mr. Lee said. "You will need this mutual affection to take your minds off your stomachs."

"I don't get you," Terrence said. He smiled, then decided there was nothing to smile about. He stopped smiling.

"Get this then, Mr. O'Reilly. If my daughter persists in her tasteless and mysterious affection for you, I'm going to pack her bag and set it on the doorstep this evening. You can take care of her from now on. And with your present financial prospects I think she'll have to get used to a series of eighteen day diets."

"You're not going to give me a job?" Terrence said, still puzzled by the nature of developments.

"No, I'm not going to give you a job," Mr. Lee said. "I wouldn't give you a job—"

Mr. Lee was saved the trouble of finishing his sentence by an urgent knock on the door.

"Come in," he said.

A well-dressed worried-looking man entered. He glanced from Mr. Lee to Terrence, then back to Mr. Lee again. "There's been some trouble, sir. A fifty-thousand dollar bearer bond has disappeared."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Lee said. "Nothing 'disappears' in this bank."

"Well, we haven't been able to find it sir. Mr. Zembelli asked for a check of his bonds, and when we went through his envelope the fifty-thousand dollar bond was gone."

"Is Mr. Zembelli here now?"

"Yes, sir. Very much so, if you know what I mean."

"I understand." Mr. Lee turned to Terrence. "You'll have to excuse me now. We were through with our talk, at any rate."

"I'm pretty good at finding things," Terrence said unexpectedly. "Why don't you let me help you?"

Mr. Lee smiled. Then he laughed. It wasn't a pleasant laugh. "Come along with me," he said....

* * *

"I don't figure this move," Nastee said.

He and Tink were reclining on Terrence's shoulder, as that young man hurried after Mr. Lee's spare figure.

"You'll see," Tink said. His tone was cheerful.

"Don't gloat," Nastee said petulantly.

"I can't help it," Tink said, laughing.

TERRENCE followed Mr. Lee to a panelled room on the second floor. Present were several bank officials, and a round little man with red cheeks and mournful brown eyes.

"Ah, Mr. Zembelli," Mr. Lee said.

"My bond, where is my bond?" Mr. Zembelli said dolefully.

"Well, that's what we're going to find out," Mr. Lee said.

"That's nice of you," Mr. Zembelli said, and went and looked out a window.

Mr. Lee picked up a thick brown folder from a desk. He removed a sheaf of bonds and went through them carefully, noting their numbers against a typewritten list on the cover of the folder.

"It's not here," he said.

"We know that," Mr. Zembelli said in a mournful voice.

Mr. Lee went into an open vault and Terrence followed him. Mr. Lee looked on a shelf where the Zembelli folder had been kept, and then got down on his knees and crawled about

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the floor. When he stood, his face was flushed and there was a worried line about his eyes. He glanced at another of the officials, shrugged his shoulders and went outside.

"We're still looking," he said to Mr. Zembelli's sadly hunched shoulders.

"I don't like to be putting you to all this trouble," Mr. Zembelli said, sighing. "I shouldn't have bothered you with my bonds, maybe, in the first place. But everybody knows it isn't safe to keep them in the home. Your bank says so on its radio program. So I brought them down here where I could have them always safe."

There was an embarrassed silence.

Terrence suddenly felt a tug at his finger. Glancing down he saw nothing; but the tug was unmistakably repeated. He moved willy-nilly in the direction of the pull.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Lee asked waspishly.

"I—I don't quite know."

Terrence was led across the room, and the pressure on his finger caused him to hold his arm out before him, so that he looked like a water-diviner as he moved hesitantly along. He stopped at a bookcase and his hand was moved up and placed against a large dictionary. He removed it from the shelf under the same invisible compulsion that had led him to it; and then, because he didn't know what else to do, opened it and flipped through its pages.

Everyone in the room was watching this strange behavior, so he turned, and smiled weakly at them. Then he put the dictionary back in place.

Again there was the tugging on his finger and he was taken back to the desk where Mr. Zembelli's folder rested.

"What kind of nonsense is this?" Mr. Lee snapped.

"Let him alone, please," Mr. Zembelli said in a soft, despairing voice. "He is maybe more efficent than even this so-effecient bank."

Terrence picked up the folder, put it down again; and then he saw a tiny edge of paper extending from beneath the desk blotter. He pulled at it, and almost simultaneously a delighted shriek sounded from Mr. Zembelli.

"My bond, my bond!" he cried...

* * *

"What a lot of corny nonsense!" Nastee snapped. "Leading him to the dictionary first!"

"Well, it made a good act," Tink chortled.

"Now I'm mad!" Nastee muttered.

"FRANKLY, you saved us from an extremely awkward situation," Mr. Lee said to Terrence with reluctant grace. "I think perhaps we might resume our previous conversation—"

An officer of the bank touched his arm, whispered in his ear. Mr. Lee glanced at Terrence, who was smiling cheerfully. Mr. Lee's gaze slid down to Terrence's outside suit pocket.

Mr. Lee coughed. "What is that in your pocket, please?" he said in a gentle voice.

"In my pocket?" Terrence reached down, pulled out an impressively embossed bond. "Well, well," he said.

"Ah—precisely," Mr. Lee said, taking the bond from his hand.

"It must have got in there while I was—er—looking for the other one," Terrence muttered in confusion.

"Ah—yes," Mr. Lee said. "Well, may I escort you to the door?"

* * *

"What a dirty trick," Tink said, with feeling.

"You see, I win!"

"Yes, but you had to make him look like a thief."

"Ah, so what? I told you he was a dope."

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The two Leprechauns rode downstairs on Terrence's slumping shoulders...

* * *

The lobby of the bank was crowded with mid-afternoon depositors. Mr. Lee, along with several officers of the bank, led Terrence rather pointedly toward the revolving doors.

"I can't understand how that bond got in my pocket," Terrence said. "It's been a funny day. Things keep happening to me in the darndest way."

Suddenly the revolving doors spun harder than usual and three stocky men pushed their way into the lobby. They were masked, and carried guns in their hands.

"Stick 'em up!" they shouted.

"My God!" cried Mr. Lee.

Silence—deep tense silence—settled like a pall over the large room.

Terrence heard a faint tinkling laugh, and then something like red-hot darning needle jabbed him in the rear.

"Ouch!" he bellowed and leaped forward, clasping both hands to his offended region.

"Smart guy," one of the bandits said, and his finger closed on the trigger of his gun.

But nothing happened.

And Terrence, forced into action, so to speak, promptly slugged the man on the jaw. Terrence had his shortcomings, but they were not in the area of physical effectiveness. The man went down in an untidy heap.

The other two men tried to fire their guns, but before they could get them working, Terrence was on them like an enraged lion, laying about with savage enthusiasm.

It was all over in a twinkling..

* * *

"Aw, I quit," Nastee said disgustedly.

"You'd better!"

"You're acting like a Leprechaun in a B movie," Nastee said witheringly. "Hold-up men! Heroics! It's enough to make me sick..."

MR. LEE SAT at his desk, a rare smile on his face. With him were Terrence and Carol, arm-in-arm, and the president of the bank.

"We need a new detective, it so happens," Mr. Lee was saying.

"We couldn't find a better one," the president of the bank said, beaming at Terrence.

"Oh, darling," Carol said happily.

From the edge of an inkwell on Mr. Lee's desk, Tink and Nastee surveyed the scene with varying reactions.

"Gosh, isn't she pretty," Tink said, sighing.

"Ah, they're still a pair of dopes. And I got an idea—"

"No, that's not fair. You said you quit."

"Yeah, but I changed my mind. I—"

Tink turned and pushed Nastee very hard. There was a barely audible *plunk* as Nastee fell into the inkwell...

"What was that?" the president of the bank inquired, peering at the inkwell.

"Air bubble," Mr. Lee said crisply.

He picked up a pen and began jabbing it into the inkwell and the noise it made drowned out Nastee's impotent protests and Tink's delighted laughter....

THE END

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TIME-TRAVEL ADVERTISING

★ By H. R. STANTON ★

SINCE TIME travel so far (and possibly always—but let's hope not) is purely a mental proposition, it is fascinating to note that advertisers have always been among the first to stick out their necks with predictions of the future. Just reflect back to the wonderful ads predicting the post-war world as planned by the manufacturers during the second World War! They had some honeys!

Some fans, science-fiction and other types too, have made a hobby of studying old magazines purely for the predictions they have made in their advertising matter. It is a captivating hobby and an excellent check on what the present predictions are. Just thumb through some magazines, almost any will do, although the early radio and technical magazines are best, and note what the advertisers had to say of the future, that is, today. With surprising accuracy they forecast many of the things in common use now.

By extension we are doing the same thing of course. But in all of the early advertisements there seems to be a certain naivete, compounded mainly of conservative tastes, which tends to make the predictions, though correct in general outline, rather ridiculous in detail. Styles and fashions and tastes in matters of design particularly, change so rapidly that we have to laugh at the prognostications. Will our guesses appear as odd to our children and their children? If things follow true to form, probably they will. Fortunately however the general level of taste in design has risen so much that involved as it is with the principle of functionality and not sheer decorativeness, it is likely that we may only draw smiles from the future, not belly-laughs.

A perfect opportunity to test this is found in examining old copies of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, along with old copies of *Radio News*. You'll turn up some interesting results and you'll be addicted for life...

AMAZING TALKWRITER

★ By LESLIE PHELPS ★

A GADGET for directly changing speech to typewritten words is in the cards. From Switzerland comes a report of amazing developments along this line, though everywhere technicians and inventors are wracking their brains and equipments to achieve it.

The "talkwriter" (it's as good a name as any) is essentially a typewriter coupled to an electronic miracle. It is an electric typewriter linked by a complex maze of circuitry and mechanical linkages with a microphone feeding into a special series of filters. These filters are the clue to the apparatus.

Everyone has seen oscillographic pictures of human speech and has noted how one sound differs from another. Frequency, wavelength and intensity all change. Now if there was some way to sort and analyze these differences, one might stand a chance of creating a "talkwriter". That this can be done is demonstrated by the existence of speaking robots like the "Vodor" and others which were in the news a while back.

In the Swiss invention—which is still in the developmental stage—a set of electrical filters is capable of doing that sort of job. Just how they operate is a secret of course, but in some way they create an electrical impulse corresponding to a sound, say like "ah" and that electrical impulse actuated the electro-mechanical apparatus which causes the typewriter section of the machine to print the letters "a" and "h".

This is just one more evidence of man's ability to conquer what ten years ago were thought of as almost insoluble problems. But Electronic wizardry coupled with great theoretical advances in understanding what communication and speech are all about, have made these startling advances not only conceivable but realizable.

The "talkwriter" invented by the Swiss is not really the ultimate invention we have been describing. It will not produce a typewritten record of what is said. Instead it delivers a cryptic stenographic form of alphabet which must be interpreted. But it is definitely a step in the right direction. In fact it is obviously only a matter of time and effort before the end we've spoken of is attainable.

If we were only gifted to look twenty years into the future to catch a glimpse of the marvels that await us! What a thrill that would be. Even if we think only of the gadgetry how astounding the world would appear to us! Well, since we can't we'll rely on the efforts of the science-fiction authors and we'll take our trips into the future vicariously. It's certainly better than not going at all!

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As he held up the grisly package the thing in the darkness moved toward him, its jaws slavering...

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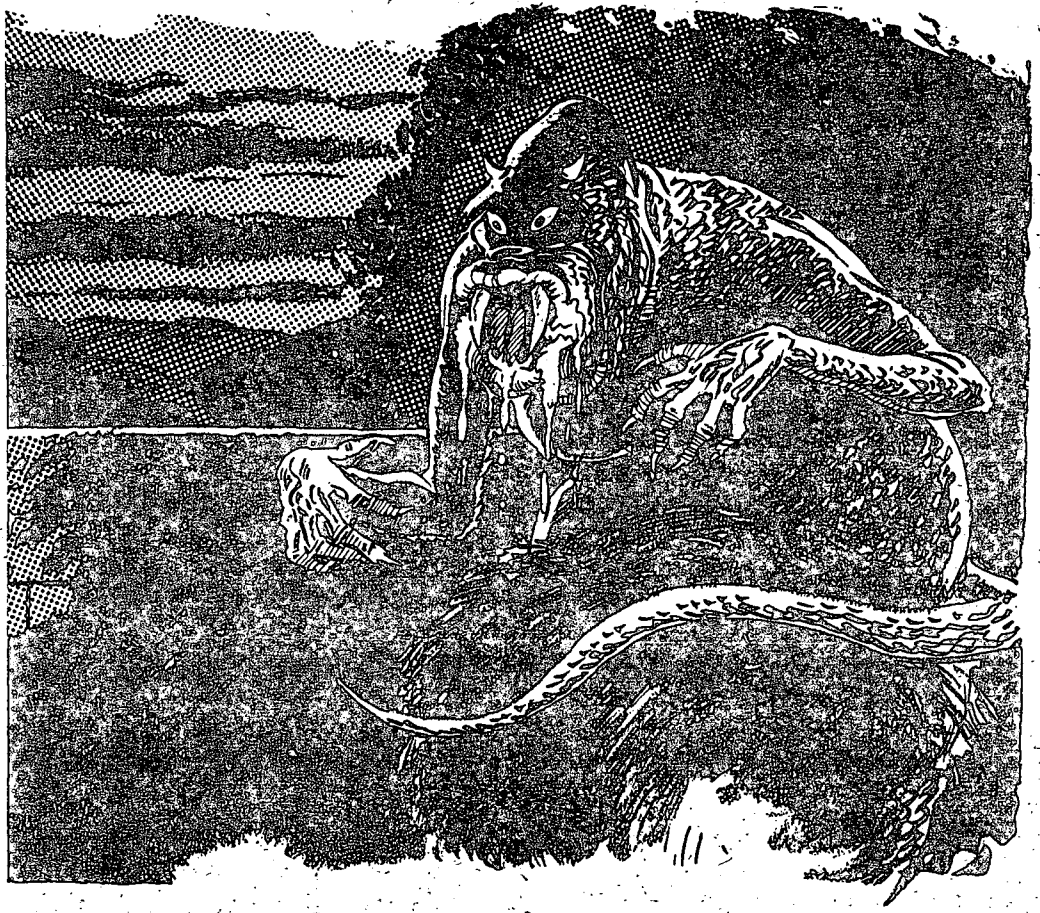
The DARK BALCONY

His Aunt was a strange old woman, and stranger still was the dark balcony she kept locked from prying eyes. For a good reason . . .



By Emil Petaja

MY AUNT Ermintrude Calder may not have been the most wicked woman San Francisco ever saw, but I insist that she be listed among the top ten. I used to say to her, "Auntie, weren't you a Maiden Lane prostitute back in the Barbary Coast days, when Maiden Lane was anything but Maiden Lane?"

Auntie would fasten me down with those improbable yellow eyes of hers. Her pale narrow nostrils would twitch and she would lash out. "I was *not!*" And her jewel-encrusted claws would lash out in an angry gesture too.

"Then what kind were you?"

"I loved to bedevil her like that. I

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loved to watch that triangular mask-face of hers cloud up and her shoulders go stiff under her regal purple silk. Auntie Ermintrude was invariably painted to the gills, but she was not pretty to look at. She never had been. She was too bony, for one thing, and then those odd-shaped blonde eyes of hers. Eerie, to say the least. Auntie Ermintrude was old, old, old. To me it seemed she must have always been like that. Old and ugly and completely fascinating.

I was nine when she cornered me out at the far end of her gazebo, drinking her favorite French cologne. It was then I formed the opinion that she was an old witch who took pleasure in devouring young boys and I must say that that opinion has changed only slightly during the intervening years.

Later I realized that it wasn't my drinking her cologne that outraged her. She didn't care a damn what I drank or if it killed me dead. And she had plenty of perfume of all kinds. They say olfactory sensations are the most vividly remembered, and I can well believe it. One whiff of that redolent heliotrope cologne and I break out in a cold sweat. No, it was my going out on her gazebo which so infuriated Auntie Ermintrude.

THIS GAZEBO, which opened out only from Auntie Ermintrude's sitting room next to her bedroom on the third floor, was much like any such architectural flight of fancy, only longer perhaps, and through its baroque-patterned woodwork one gained a spell-binding view of the Golden Gate and environs clear off into the Pacific Ocean. Which view was, presumably, its *raison d'etre.*

It was naughty of me to have sneaked upstairs and into Auntie's rooms, and thence out onto her gazebo where I thought nobody would catch me sampling the contents of that intriguing bottle filched from her dressing table. But how was I to know that the gazebo was forbidden territory to everyone but Auntie, and that anybody caught so much as sniffing the cool ocean breeze was likely to end up in a mangled condition two hundred feet down the cliffside?

As it was, she almost did kill me, the witch.

You might say shame on me for teasing my aging relative as I later on did. Yet Auntie loved it. She enjoyed being told she was wicked. It made her feel young again. And if I pleased her enough she would give me this house and all her money when she died. There were other possible heirs. Ours is a careless and far-flung family. But Auntie and I had a special unspoken tie. We were different.

After the gazebo incident (the first gazebo incident, I should say) I was packed off to school by my fond mama. Tradition has it that all mamas are sweet darlings to be cherished until they die and forever after. I don't see it myself. But then I may be heartless and callous. Auntie Ermintrude, even while she was boxing my ears, had more appeal for me than did sweet mama and all her tears and eternal fussing. Since mama had nobody else to spoil, she spoiled me. She did a good job of it, I must say. She must have enjoyed herself thoroughly and that I do not begrudge her. But if at fifteen I found myself yawning over her coffin as it was dropped back into the great mother earth, I might just go so far as to hint she brought it on herself.

It wasn't that I didn't like mama. She just bored me.

I remember the day of her funeral so well. Not because I was unhappy; I remember it because my new boots got all muddy and I vaguely blamed mama for this annoyance. Also be-

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cause I had a note from Auntie Ermintrude, which I clutched excitedly in my overcoat pocket all through the ceremony.

Auntie wished to see me about my future. There was no mention of mama's demise. I was to come and see her this very afternoon at precisely three o'clock. Things would be decided after she looked me over.

Auntie met me at the door herself.

"Your boots are muddy," she said. "Wipe them."

She watched me carefully as I scuffed the mud off them. At last she was satisfied and nodded me in. I stepped into the awesomely huge, awesomely gloomy front hall.

"We're all alone in this house," Auntie said.

I stared at her. She was exactly the same as I remembered her, just as excitingly hideous. And her heliotrope perfume did things to me. All in a rush I remembered the gazebo and what had happened there. I touched my face where the little white scars were, where her glittering rings had bitten into me. I panted with excitement and terror, my brain reeling with the redolence of her perfume.

She stood quite close to me, here in the gloomy front hall of her Russian Hill mansion, looking down at me with those weird yellow eyes.

"We're all alone," she said again. "You're shivering, Arthur. Get your coat off and come in by the parlor fire. You'll probably catch pneumonia going out in all this rain. Your precious mama never did have much consideration."

THE LOOK she flashed me when she took my overcoat made my blood jump. I wanted to laugh. There's nothing that puts two people closer than a wicked concept enjoyed simultaneously.

"All right, stop sniggering and get in here."

I realized I was, and stopped.

"Sit here on this couch and talk to me."

It was wonderful sitting by the crackling fire with this wicked woman, drinking coffee with a little brandy in it. Mama had never allowed me to drink coffee, and the very idea of the brandy made me a little delirious. It was the high point of my life, and Auntie Ermintrude was indelibly stamped my favorite person.

She darted little looks at me.

"Aren't you afraid of me?" she demanded.

"No."

"They say I'm a witch."

"I'm not scared."

"The neighborhood children make up nasty rhymes about me, but they scat whenever I walk down the street."

"They stink!" I was quite definite. The picture her words evoked made my lip curl. Them!

"Why, thank you, Arthur!" Aunt Ermintrude beamed down on me, a little ghoulishly perhaps.

"I'm not scared of *anything!*" I bragged.

"Not *anything?*"

"Nope."

"Good!" Auntie cackled and rocked back in her chair. She was pleased with me, I could tell. "How old did you say you were, Arthur?"

"Nearly fifteen."

"What have they told you about me?" she asked. When she cocked her head and leaned very close I could see she was wearing a red wig. I could see the netting line across her puckered forehead. I stared.

"Well?" she snapped.

I licked my lips. "One of the kids at school said you were a madam. What's that?"

"Never mind. Whatever it means all that was a long time ago. You'd

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think people would spend more time keeping their own noses wiped." Her mouth twitched and I wasn't sure whether she was angry or amused. "So they're still harping on that, eh? Well, what they *don't* know—oh, ho! Arthur, do you remember that day I caught you out on my gazebo?"

My hand touched the little scars. I winced.

"How could you forget, eh? Arthur, do you know what a gazebo is?"

"Sure."

It was a word I wasn't likely to forget. She had used it several times while she went to work on me.

"It's like a long porch, only upstairs, and you go out on it and look at the view. It's Italian, I think." A new thought pricked me. "Why? Is yours different?"

She stared hard into the fire. It was as if she were seeing something terrifying—yet fascinating. I looked there, too. I wanted to see what she was seeing, but all I saw were the leaping flames.

"Yes, Arthur. A different view entirely."

All at once the roots of my hair prickled and it seemed like there were many little slimy animals crawling up my spine. All the same I itched to see what she saw in the fire. . .

"Arthur."

"Yes, Auntie."

"Run upstairs and fetch my shawl. It's on the big chair in front of the fire in my sitting room. You know the room."

"Sure, Auntie."

Of course I knew the room. It was at the far end of the third floor hall. I picked up Auntie's shawl and started back with it. Then I noticed the door leading to the gazebo. It had an opaque window in it, a window made up of little frosty spider-webs. I couldn't see a thing on the other side.

Now was my chance! My fingers were turning that cold door-knob when an alarm rang in my head. Why did Auntie want me to fetch her shawl? Why? It wasn't a bit cold downstairs in the parlor. It was warm, stuffy. There was something crafty and bland about the way she sent me up here on this errand. It was a trick—a test!

Well, I wasn't going to fall for it.

I swallowed my urgent desire to open the gazebo door, turned and ran for the stairs.

"Here's your shawl," I told Auntie breathlessly.

Her yellow eyes invaded me. After a minute she showed her narrow teeth in a ghoulish leer. "There's a good boy," she said, and put on her shawl.

A door banged somewhere in the rear of the house. The French clock behind us chimed the hour. Auntie muttered that it was getting late, and we must get things settled. A few pointed questions as to my preference in the matter of schools, and my future was disposed of.

YEARS went by. I saw Aunt Ermintrude only briefly and at long intervals. First because that was how she wanted it, then because in the intriguing business of growing up I became too involved with other interests to concern myself much about Aunt Ermintrude. She was my meal ticket. She paid all my bills. That was all I required of her. Two fellows whose friendship I had developed during my college years went abroad the following year. One was a half-way artist, the other a composer of sorts. They invited me to join them, and exercise my dubious gifts as a writer to make it a cultivated trio. As you can imagine it was all a device to raise hell and to avoid the tedium of earning a living.

Aunt Ermintrude agreed, but her usual brusque letter made it plain

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that I was to high-tail it back to San Francisco whenever she needed me. It was during my second hilarious year in Paris that her come-home telegram arrived and I knew better than to ignore it.

She was ill. I knew that meant gravely ill, dying, in fact. Aunt Ermintrude was not the kind of woman to interrupt my round of pleasure because she had the sniffles. Auntie was a great believer in pleasure. She had spent a good part of her life providing it, and as her favorite nephew I was allowed to indulge myself to the fullest extent.

But she was equally capable of cutting me off without a dime if I disobeyed her at this crisis.

You might say this was my third visit to Aunt Ermintrude's house. Surely it was my third important visit. During my school years I had dropped in on her only long enough to wheedle extra money out of her, and on these encounters I invariably brought along a friend with me to verify the urgency of my demand. Nothing even remotely interesting occurred during these in-between visits. My mind was so preoccupied at such times that these visits were like dull but necessary trips to the bank.

I snatched a California Street cable car, although I am not particularly sentimental. A taxi would have been more to the point, but somehow I felt inward tuggings as if I actually possessed a heart. San Francisco's hills, like the hills of Rome, have secret powers, and I defy anyone to live here any length of time and remain aloof.

I was alone, of course. I dislike being alone, and never am if I can avoid it. In me you do not find a solitary dreamer. An avid sensualist, yes. Imagination, yes. Philosopher, no. Live and let live, I say.

I had been away from San Francisco some years. College back East. Paris. And now, as the cable car lurched uphill, creaking like a schooner under a stiff wind, I gawked like a tourist at the familiar sights. At the bay-windowed facades interrupted now and again by little parks, at the mist-blue Bay with its daily quotient of ships and barges and ferries which have always seemed to me too scenic to be of any practical value. At the morning sky bounding with luminous grey clouds wind-driven from the western sea.

I worked myself up into quite a mood.

Glancing downward at what was once Barbary Coast, the Coast of shanghaied sailors and vicious sydney ducks and cradles of cheap flesh. I asked myself, do the spectres of that bygone horror come back to lurk about those sin-steeped streets and remember?

Of course Aunt Ermintrude and that ugly mansion of hers were uppermost in my thoughts. To me Aunt Ermintrude *was* that old sinful San Francisco. By the time I slid down off my sideways perch I was fretting about Auntie's condition and lamenting how close to death she must be.

I GROPED for a cigarette, found none, so I stopped at the little market on Auntie's corner. The old Italian who waddled out from the recesses of the meat freezer pinched his eyes at me oddly. Maybe he remembered me from eons ago, although that walrus face of his meant nothing to me. I daresay he is a kind, sweet, lovable man, but that sly look of his irritated me beyond measure.

I told him what I wanted, and he reached two packs of my brand from behind him. Then he held back.

"You're Missus Calder's nephew?"

"Yes, I am."

He smiled, but there was a glazed blandness about his smile. Mr. Pig-

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goti respected Aunt Ermintrude. But he did not like her. No one in the neighborhood liked her. They shunned her. They were afraid of her. I remembered how she told me the children made bad rhymes about her, but hid when she made an appearance on the street.

"I hear she is seek," he said.

"Yes," I said.

He stared down at his beefy fingers as if they'd suddenly changed into snakes. Then he dropped my cigarettes on the counter, picked up my money, and again gave me that sickly grin.

"Would you do me a favor, mister?"

"Perhaps."

"My boy, she is seek, too. She cannot make the delivery. You will breeng thees to Missus Calder for me?"

"What on earth is it?" I demanded.

And rightly. The butcher's paper package he hiked up to the counter was bleeding at the cracks where it was tied and one corner was open enough to assure me that its contents ought to have been consigned to the slaughter house trash barrels, not to Aunt Ermintrude.

Mr. Piggoti's hairy nose flanged out.

"She always gets thees."

"Always? You must be mad!"

"Twice a week, every week," he insisted. "Ever since I open thees butcher shop. Always the same." Mr. Piggoti's tone was one of protest and near desperation. His wide nostrils quivered his distaste.

I stared.

"But what on earth does she do with it?"

"I don't know." The butcher's voice was hushed and throaty. "She pay me very well. She say tell nobody, and I tell nobody. You her nephew. You take it to her. You ask what she does weeth it. Piggoti, he don't want to know!"

Auntie was ensconced in the great four-poster of the generally unused master bedroom downstairs. She looked like a tiny brown spider against all that antiseptic whiteness. It was shocking to see her without her red wig and her warpaint. She was almost bald, her face was speckled and a mass of wrinkles. But somehow she looked more human like this—except for those yellow eyes.

"Matilda," she croaked painfully at her housekeeper. "You should have warned me Arthur was here. I wanted to fix up a little. Now that he has seen me as I really am he won't love me any more."

"Shush, Auntie. I adore you."

"I kissed her leathery cheek and meant it. Ignoring the doctor's death-room gravity, the brisk nurse's glances, and Matilda's sniffling, I began to flirt with Auntie and make sly references to her wicked and indecent behavior during my absence. I told her that none of the tarts I had seen in Paris had half her zest and fire.

I raved on and on, as if by all this to keep Death at his distance. I pitied myself that I had not seen more of Auntie while there was yet time, that I had not probed into the fantastic secret of Calder House and that gazebo. Now I would never know...

THE DOCTOR touched my arm, indicating by gesture that he wanted to have a private word with me. I started to follow him to the far end of the room.

Aunt Ermintrude stopped us.

"You can say anything you have to say to my face, Doctor Hubbard," she told him, with just a *soupcon* of her old malignance. "I know I'm dead. It's just a matter of hours. Or have I got

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even that long, Doctor?"

Doctor Hubbard pressed his lips.

"Doctor!" she croaked harshly. "You can't let me die yet! You must keep me alive until sunset! Until dark! You must give me something! Give me something!" She fell back, gasping.

"You must do as she says, Doctor," I told him. "Keep her alive until dark—somehow."

He gave her a hypo. Her taut body went limp as death. Her mouth twitched and she was still. So still I thought she must be dead. A wave of indignation swept me. She must not be dead! Lord knows Auntie had lived long enough, but all she asked was to live until dark. I had personal reasons for wanting this, too. I wanted to share her incredible secret—to *know*. I was like Auntie. I hadn't had time to be as wicked as she had been, but give me time and I probably would outdistance her. Whatever the result I must *know!* I must!

Dr. Hubbard was testing her heart.

"She's dead!"

"No. I gave her a strong sedative. If she sleeps she might live until tonight." He straightened, his lips curving a tight little smile. "I have known Miss Calder for a long time now. She always had a way of getting what she wants. She might get this too."

"But—"

"I have to leave now," he told me. "There's really nothing I can do. If she has absolute quiet she may survive even until tomorrow morning. Call me the instant she stirs."

"Will that do any good?"

He shook his head and left.

I prowled the ancient house with its high ceilings and intricately carved woodwork. I suppose in my heathen way I was praying all the time. Praying that Auntie would live. Selfishly, of course. I must learn her secret. *Share* it. We were of one blood, she and I.

Matilda told me some interesting things while I nibbled at the food she fixed for me. Matilda had been with Auntie since the house was built. She was old, like Auntie, a little deaf, and abysmally stupid and unimaginative. She did just what she was told to do, and kept to her corner room off the kitchen with a lack of interest in Auntie's affairs which approached fanaticism.

There were no other servants. A char-woman came in to do the heavier cleaning once a week, and her husband washed windows and moved furniture for her. A Japanese gardener tended to the miniature front garden, but the back garden was sealed up. Despite the incipient danger to the house due to the fact that the cliff wall was slowly crumbling away under the impact of seasonal rains, the high-walled rear garden was kept sealed and all were forbidden entrance thereto. The kitchen door opened just to the front of the wall, and there were no rear windows on the first floor. All this was so curious that I left off pretending to eat and went upstairs to look down at this deserted spot.

What I saw through an upstairs window was disappointing. There was no garden at all. It was a lifeless place, with the crumbling cliff-wall as an end to it. The earth was hard and grey; even weeds didn't like this place. There was nothing strange about all this, actually. Maybe the weed pollen couldn't jump the wall. Calder House was on the very top of the hill, and the house was so constructed that the rear of it was quite safe from prying eyes.

I LOOKED upward at the bottom of Auntie's precious gazebo Auntie wasn't up in her own bedroom. There was a more interesting reason for that than merely because tending her on

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the ground floor was easier. Auntie wanted no one on her gazebo. Or anywhere near it.

I went up.

Auntie's sitting room door was locked but I had provided myself with a set of house keys. As the door creaked open I was nine years old again, whiffing the redolence of Auntie's heliotrope perfume. My heart pounded as I stepped in the room.

It had an olden flavor, Auntie's sitting room did, but with a risque dash. I had a sharp cognizance, almost like a memory, of Auntie waiting here for her lover—for her lover....

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree,
Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man—
Down to a sunless sea...

—Now, what on earth put that in my mind? Schoolboy rhymes memorized long ago. Rhymes. Nasty rhymes about Auntie. What was I thinking? What was it? It was right on the tip of my mind, but now it was gone.

Ah!

There was something in Auntie's fireplace that caught my eye. Papers had been burned in it, probably the last time Auntie was here, and one corner scrap had evaded the flames. I nipped it out of the black ashes. It was the rough-cut end of what had apparently been a large piece of butcher's paper. Piggoti's package flashed to mind. Where had I left it? Oh, yes. In the front hall with my hat and topcoat. So Piggoti wasn't crazy. How many pieces of butcher's paper had been burned in this fireplace just as this had been? How many? A hundred? A thousand?

I went out on the gazebo.

I went over every inch of the long balcony overlooking the Bay and that blasted spot of earth below. At the far end I found odd stains in the flooring. Here Auntie's heliotrope perfume was very strong. As if she had poured it on those stains to hide—

Yes! Another odor. An odor that was both offensive and fascinating. There was a hint of forbidden rapture in it, like the reek of opium poppies being prepared for the creation of satanic-paradise dreams. It made me giddy.

I blinked there, on my knees, through the railing that protected me from oblivion. I noticed that the railing was ornately carved in a repetitious pattern of wooden snakes and flowers. Good and evil. Beauty and terror. Snakes and flowers. Beyond the railing the sun was a blurred smear of yellow and bloody red. I thought it would sizzle when it dropped into the inky sea.

The desire to *see*—to *know*—made me shiver. I wanted to leap over that railing to stifle it because I couldn't bear the idea that perhaps I would *never* know.

"Arthur! Mister Arthur!"

It was Matilda, calling me from the stairs.

"ARTHUR and I want to be alone," Aunt Ermintrude told Matilda and the disproving nurse.

The nurse frowned deeper. "But—"

"Get out, both of you! Get out!"

Matilda sniffled and waddled away. The nurse hesitated, but the look in Auntie's yellow eyes put her out in the hall as well, with mutterings about calling the doctor.

"Arthur, shut the door."

"Yes, Auntie."

"Lock it."

"Yes, Auntie."

"Now come here close to me. I haven't much time. It will be dark soon, won't it, Arthur?"

"Within an hour."

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She tried to sit up. "Arthur, I will be able to make it upstairs, won't I?"

"No, Auntie."

"But you could carry me, Arthur?"

"Sure, Auntie, but—"

"You don't think I'd make it alive, is that it?"

My head dropped. What could I say? Of course she wouldn't make it. She looked dead and in her grave already. Some fierce inner flame of evil alone was burning.

She snorted convulsively.

"All right, then. I'll have to tell you, Arthur. And *you'll* have to break it to Daniel."

She spoke the name with wistful tenderness.

"Daniel?" I licked my lips. My throat was suddenly like paper. The word popped out like a wrinkled pea out of a pea-shooter. Auntie ignored it.

"Arthur, you and I are different. Don't say anything. I know you are. You're like me. That's why we always got along so well. Neither of us are at all like *them*." Her contempt included the entire human race besides us. "We aren't afraid to look the devil in the face and laugh at him. Are we, Arthur? Laugh! Yes, Arthur, I'm a wicked woman and I'll roast in hell forever. But nobody can say I haven't lived life to the hilt. God, how I've lived! People have gibbered and gossiped about me and my sins for the last sixty years. But they don't know the half of it, Arthur!

"When I was through all *they* could show me I wanted more. There *was* more and I knew I would be the one to find it. I met a man. Or maybe he wasn't a man. I don't know. But he taught me secrets *they* don't even dream about. *They* have no idea what goes on in the dark of the night—in the very air they breathe. Nor do they realize that the visions they see when they sin with gin and opium and hashish are as real as—

"Never mind, Arthur. Call them demons, dracs. Call them holy visions. Call them anything you like. But call them strong enough, Arthur, *and they'll make themselves known!*"

I shivered.

"The gazebo?"

"Yes! The gazebo! You see, these others can't come through to us just anywhere. No, only in a few secret places in the world. And my gazebo is one of these places. No, it didn't happen that way just by accident. I had this house built just here so they could come through and find *me!* I learned from this man that here on this hill was one of the secret thin spots, up here in the middle of the air. By careful planning my architects struck it. What a time the builders had! Three of them tumbled down the cliff and were smashed. The cacodemons get so playful sometimes. I intended the entrance to be right in my living room, but it just missed.

"And of course they couldn't all come through. That would be disastrous for the world. Only one came, Arthur. But what a one! Oh—you've brought the sweets for little Daniel!"

I blinked down at the parcel under my arm, the parcel Mr. Pigotti had given me.

"Little Daniel?" I mumbled.

AUNTIE laughed. It was like breaking dry toast. "Daniel isn't so little any more. I keep forgetting how long it's been since—" A spasm of pain set her shuddering. "Arthur! Listen! I've left you everything in my will. But there's a condition. You must live in this house—alone. And you must be nice to Daniel. See that he gets his sweets twice every week and—" Her face blackened with agony. "It's—it's dark now. Isn't it, Arthur? Daniel will be up there soon, pawing at the gazebo door and want-

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ing in. Go up there, Arthur! Hurry! Tell Daniel that I—that I—"

There was a rasping sigh, then nothing.

I left Matilda and the nurse to their duties and went up to auntie's sitting room to wait. I had made it quite clear I was not to be disturbed, and I bolted the door inside to make sure. I put down that clammy parcel I still carried, and lit a cigarette. I couldn't sit still. I paced the room in a frenzy.

Auntie was right. I was like her. I was! all my life I had secretly wanted something extreme to happen to me—to see into dark, forbidden places. Soon I would. Soon I'd have the full and complete answer to everything, the culmination oif twelve years of waiting—since auntie slashed my face on the gazebo when I was nine. I had sinned since then, but it was pale wan stuff. This was—was beyond—natural—human—experience. This was for aunt Ermintrude—and for me!

Finally...

It came, the stealthy pad of footsteps along the gazebo. And with it a slithering sound, as if the creature out there were possessed of a thick tail that swished from side to side as it advanced toward the sitting room door.

I wasn't the remotest bit afraid. If I were to die, well and good. At least I would know the answer in that split-second before oblivion. I crushed out my last cigarette carefully, then hastily snapped the string on Mr. Piggoti's parcel and half unwrapped it temptingly.

The creature outside was pawing at the door and making odd half-human sounds.

I sucked in a deep breath, then stepped quickly to the gazebo door and opened it.

I tried not to gasp. But I think I did, just a little. It wasn't easy not to. It wasn't so much that he had long pointed ears and scales all over his towering body. I think more it was the vague familiarness of that snouted face and those yellow, yellow eyes.

Coleridge.

It hit me now.

Like woman wailing for her demon lover.

That was what I had sensed about Auntie's sitting room, as if her well-guarded secret had become infused in the very walls and had been, for one brief instant, in tune with my demanding mind.

The creature looked at me curiously and, I thought, a bit resentfully. He hadn't expected *me*. Nor had I quite expected—*him*. Well, I had to break this awkward silence, and Aunt Ermintrude had unfortunately died before she could tell me just what I should say.

So I simply smiled, held out the open parcel, and said: "Hello, Cousin Daniel."

THE END

SCREWY HELIUM!

★ By WILLIAM KARNEY ★

THE FANTASTIC experiments which can be performed with liquid air are startling enough and familiar to most people through the numerous demonstrations that have been given. The practice of dipping a rubber ball in liquid air and then

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dropping it on the floor—to see it shatter into a million pieces—is spectacular.

But weird as the behavior of liquid air is, it takes a back seat for the singular behavior of that most unusual of liquified gases, helium. With new apparatus for reducing gases to liquids, liquid helium is being studied with diligence by scientists for it promises to be the clue to some fundamental mysteries.

Liquid helium has the unique property of being able to flow over the edge of any container in which it is placed! It simply crawls up the side of the container and over! Why? Nobody knows—yet.

Another unbelievable property is the fact that it can flow through materials. It can be made to penetrate great thickness of metal. It goes through steel like hot water through a paper bag!

All of these reactions are startling enough. But they have not been explained on the basis of what we know about matter. Liquid helium is very close to absolute zero in temperature, in fact, in some forms of liquid helium it is believed that there are particles of the material at that temperature actually floating around in the liquid. Liquid helium also has a peculiar behavior in a magnetic field writhing and twisting and conforming to that field like a tubeful of iron filings.

Materials immersed in liquid helium and brought down to such low temperatures give evidence of changed matter too. A well known example of this is the super-conductivity of lead under these circumstances. A loop of lead metal whose temperature has been so lowered exhibits almost zero resistance and a current through it will flow indefinitely even with the exciting voltage removed.

All of these things are mere spectacles without practical application—as yet. Regardless of whether or not they are applied, they are worth studying because they undoubtedly will lead to an understanding of the fundamental nature of matter. Scientists in fact, call a certain form of liquid helium which is neither gas, liquid or solid, a "fourth state of matter", sometimes referred to as the "quantum state".

Getting into the nucleus of the atom through atomic bombardment is commonplace. Getting into the nucleus of the atom through low temperatures appears to be another, and as important, a technique.

RADIATION SENSOR

★ By A. MORRIS ★

ONE OF the oldest electrical instruments in the world is the electroscope. Most people are familiar with this instrument from high school chemistry of physics in the form of a gold-leaf electroscope. The electroscope of this type detects electric positive or negative charges and shows that by the divergence of a pair of gold leaves. The electroscope has been used in modern physics as a radiation detector because of the fact that if it is given an electrical charge so that the leaves diverge, and it is then permitted to stand in a field of some kind of atomic radiation, that charge will leak off and the leaves collapse.

In fact it was just through such leakage that cosmic rays were discovered. In the early days scientists couldn't account for the fact that electroscopes discharged for some unknown reason when theoretically they should have retained that charge indefinitely. Then it was realized that some unknown ionizing radiation was causing it and thus cosmic rays were discovered.

The principle of the electroscope is being used in laboratories as a radiation detector in exactly the same way. A small electroscope is charged. A worker may wear it on his wrist. Then, after the day's work, the charge remaining is carefully measured and after allowing for the normal leakage, the radiation he has been exposed to is computed!

BROOKHAVEN MIRACLE!

★ By A. T. KEDZIE ★

EXCLUDING activities in the Soviet Union about which we know nothing, there are now ten nuclear reactors, or atomic piles for experimental purposes in the world. Six of these are in the United States. The newest one at Brookhaven is a high powered pile capable of delivering about thirty thousand kilowatts of electrical power, and while this is small potatoes when compared with the bomb-producing piles at Hanford it is still enormous.

The purpose of the Brookhaven pile is purely and simply—power and research. Isotopes and electrical energy, not bombs, will come from this gigantic maze of concrete and graphite, aluminum and boron.

It is always a dramatic opening, the starting of an atomic furnace. The men operating it can't help but think back to the first one under the grandstand at the University of Chicago. At that time, the drama was intense. And each time it seems to be duplicated. The thought that one is really taking primal energy—atomic—and putting it to work, that one is imitating the Sun, is a stirring feeling indeed.

It is striking to compare the Brookhaven output with the others in the world. An experimental pile in France for example puts out with a mere fractions of a watt! And another in England delivers a few watts! Ours gives out with thirty million watts!

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REPOSSESSED

P. Harouchi was amazed at the crystal ball's powers. It seemed that it was able to foretell the future—in a peculiar way

By H. B. Hickey

IT WAS THE rain that made him enter. A thousand times Clemson Dell had stood in the shadow of Chicago's Lake Street El and gazed into this window, and somehow never had the nerve to walk in. So it must have been the rain which sparked his long pent desire.

On the dusty window, faded gilt proclaimed that inside the store, P. Harouchi sold magicians' and mediums' supplies. Indeed, Clemson had often seen P. Harouchi himself taking the sun on a warm day, a fat man with a cigar stuck in a face so greasy it must have been shaved with Crisco.

Now the door shut behind Clemson. A bell tinkled. And from behind a dim recess at the rear bustled P. Harouchi, the inevitable stogie dipping deferentially to a possible customer. Black, beady eyes came closer.

"What for do I need Dun and Bradstreet?" P. Harouchi had once said. "With my own eyes I can take a credit rating."

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The crystal ball began to glow, and he stared in amazement at what it revealed . . .

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The eyes surveyed Clemson Dell. Past fifty, and not a good fifty. Tall, skinny, ain't even got enough sense to eat right. Baggy knees, frayed cuffs, shiny sleeves. A bookkeeper; ain't got the money to eat right. Thick glasses, can't see so good. Probably lost his job. A handout.

The cigar tilted aggressively. "Whaddaya want?"

Clemson Dell licked his lips, smiled ingratiatingly. He cleared his throat with a slightly loony titter. His voice was high and wavering.

"I'd like to see something in a crystal ball."

"Yah? Who wouldn't?"

A pause. Black eyes blinked. You never could tell.

"You mean you wanta buy something?"

"Well, I thought if perhaps you had something—"

"*If* I had something? Am I in business *not* to have things? Ha ha! Got the finest line of crystal balls in the game. Step right this way."

They moved to the back of the store and P. Harouchi switched on a light. "Costs money to leave lights burning. Ha ha!"

There were tables littered with merchandise back here, shelves groaning under the weight of cartons and boxes. Clemson stared at the merchandise. P. Harouchi stared at him.

"Sorry I didn't catch the name."

"Oh. Clemson Dell."

"Dell? Dell? Thought I knew everyone in the grift."

"The grift?" murmured Clemson. P. Harouchi shook his head, still trying to place the name.

"Where you got your studio?"

"Studio? Oh. I'm right around the corner, At Mrs. Kyle's."

"Mrs. Kyle's. Sure, I knew I seen you around. Well, that's the way it goes. Lives around the corner and takes his business elsewhere. Probably Simon's. He cheats you right, I'll bet. Ha ha!"

P. Harouchi seemed to be lost in boundless admiration for Clemson. "One of the quiet kind, huh? Got your own few clients and you're satisfied to keep 'em. Smart, smart."

He waved his hand, a sweeping gesture.

"Listen, be honest with me. I'll treat you right. What do you need? Ectoplasm? I got some just in, not that wartime junk. Luminous, non-irritating, you can blow out yards of the stuff. What about trumpets? How you fixed on them?"

CLEMSON was completely befuddled. He shook his head. "Really—"

"All right. Listen, how about some slates? Or maybe you specialize in table-tipping. Levitation. I got a gimmick, say—"

"Really—" Clemson said.

"All right. I know. A crystal ball. Well, I know your type. With you, you'll want the McCoy. So here, the best in the house. A steal for one fifty-nine. I'm cutting my throat, but I want you for a steady customer."

Clemson stared at the sphere which had seemed to pop, as if by magic, into his hands. It was fairly large, almost a foot in diameter, yet surprisingly light. Opalescent, a milky cloudiness suffused it. He turned the sphere gently and the cloudiness shifted, cleared slightly, then clouded over again.

"Nice, huh?" said P. Harouchi, shrewdly noting Clemson's pleased reaction. "Looks like glass, but it ain't. New kind of plastic, made in layers, with some kind of smoke they blow in between."

"It's beautiful," Clemson murmured. "You know, when I was very small my mother took me to a fair once. We went into a gypsy fortune

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teller's tent, and the gypsy woman had a crystal ball." His tone became wistful. "After that I always wanted one."

"Gypsy! No gypsy ever had a ball like this," P. Harouchi snorted. "And listen. There's a stand goes with this one. Extra, of course, but it's got a special built-in light. Changes colors and everything. The suckers will eat it up like candy."

"Suckers?"

P. Harouchi frowned. A light dawned in his eye. He was catching on at last.

"Say! You *ain't* in the game, are you?"

"Game?" asked Clemson, getting confused again.

"Skip it. So what do you need a crystal ball for?"

"Why—" Clemson grew shy. "As I said, I've always wanted one."

P. Harouchi shrugged. "Okay by me. That's your idea of fun, have fun. One hundred and fifty-nine simoleons and you can balance it on your nose on top of the Board of Trade building for all I care."

"One *hundred* and—!" Clemson gasped.

"Maybe you thought I meant a *dollar* fifty-nine," the other snorted. "Who you kidding?"

"Why, as a matter of fact—" Clemson saw it was no use. "Oh, I could never afford that. Why, the two-week pay check I got today is only fifty dollars."

"Ha ha! A shrewd bargainer. That's a new one on me."

"Honestly," Clemson insisted. "I'll prove it to you."

He reached into his inner coat pocket and produced a long white envelope with his name typed on the front. P. Harouchi stared at the check which Clemson drew from within, and a gleam came to the dealer's eye.

"Well, too bad." He paused. "Ah, my creditors tell me my heart is too big, but I can't help it. I know you want it bad. I know you won't never be satisified with anything inferior after you seen this one. So you know what I'm going to do?"

"Why, no."

"I'm going to cut this ball to one fifty even! And I'm going to let you pay it out on time! Fifty down and the balance in ten easy payments. What do you think of that?"

"Why—Why, that's very kind of you. But—"

"Not at all. What're we here for if not to help each other?"

The check was yanked from Clemson's hand and a fountain pen slid between his fingers.

"Endorse it here. That's fine. Now, I'll just make out a sales contract and you'll be all set. And I'm not charging you a penny interest!"

P. Harouchi's tongue clattered, his pudgy figure flew. Within seconds a paper appeared in Clemson's hands. He was directed to sign, and, still bewildered, he signed. The ball, now wrapped in plain brown paper, was thrust into his fumbling grasp.

A pat on his back, a babble of words in his ear. He was out in the rain again.

P. Harouchi sighed. Beads of sweat covered his oily brow. He slapped himself on the thigh and laughed aloud. A yokel. But a *yokel*!

The ball had cost twelve dollars and sixty-three cents. Less two percent thirty days, P. Harouchi reminded himself. Sell it for fifty cash and still you got a hundred coming.

Not bad! He slapped his thigh again. Ha ha!

THREE DAYS later, and the sun shone on the Windy City again. The store was an inferno. P. Harouchi lounged outside, in the broken shadow cast by the overhead el tracks.

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A gangling figure approached and P. Harouchi glanced at it. It was none other than his erstwhile customer, Clemson Dell. Clemson drew near and P. Harouchi lifted a finger.

"H'ware you?"

"Oh, it's Mr. Harouchi." Clemson stopped, and remembered he had not yet answered the other's greeting. "Really, I don't know what to say."

"What's the matter? Trouble with the ball?"

A fanatic gleam came to Clemson's eyes, and was magnified many times by the thick lenses he wore. He straightened slightly and took a deep breath.

"Yes. Oh, yes indeed. It's been very upsetting."

"Can't see anything, huh?"

"Well—" Clemson began.

P. Harouchi cut him off. "You will. Keep trying. Say, lots of people see things and they ain't even got a crystal ball. Ha ha!"

Clemson stared at him. To anyone else the dealer's laugh would have been so false, and so filled with mockery, it could not have escaped notice nor failed to bring resentment.

Clemson was too unworldly. Moreover, he was so full of what he wanted to say that he disregarded the interruption. His eyes were almost fierce as he put his face close to the shorter man's.

"Mr. Harouchi, that crystal ball is possessed! I tell you, sir, it is possessed!"

P. Harouchi shrank back ever so slightly. You never could tell what it was with these nuts. Nevertheless, he had a comeback.

"Just you see to it you make those payments on time, or it'll be *re*-possessed! Ha ha!"

A pat on the back, almost a shove, and Clemson had been sent on his way. His long legs jackknifed, undirected by his conscious mind, and bore him toward Mrs. Kyle's in their usual ambling fashion. His head was bowed, deep in thought.

He entered his rooming house, his fingers fumbling with his key, finally managed to turn it in his door. He entered the room, carefully shut and locked the door behind him. It was a pitifully bare room, containing an iron bed, a chipped chest, a small chair and a single table.

But on that table in the center of the room reposed Clemson's crystal ball. A single ray of light came through a tear in the window shade and struck the ball. The cloudiness was pure white, now strangely excited, it seemed to Clemson. He hurried to sit down before it.

"Crystal ball," he said, like a man murmuring an invocation. "Crystal ball. Tell me, what is the future?"

TO P. HAROUCHI it seemed that in the next week or so Clemson grew even thinner and more near-sighted. Several times the gangling, withdrawn individual passed the store while its proprietor leaned glistening and obese against an el post, for all the world like a fat candle melting down in the heat.

He failed to get any greeting from Clemson. Clemson's eyes seemed fixed on some distant object. Nor was P. Harouchi averse to being ignored. Let a customer talk and he'll tell you his troubles. Or, worse yet, complain about the merchandise.

Nevertheless, as days passed and found Clemson hurrying by toward work ever later in the morning, and hastening past ever earlier in the fading afternoon, P. Harouchi was intrigued. Also, he hated to pass up a chance for a jibe. He waited, sprang.

"H'ware you?" It was almost a shout. Clemson came up short.

"Oh, Mr. Harouchi."

"Well, tell me. Are you still balled

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up? Ha ha!"

"Eh? Oh." Clemson's eyes were sunk in dark shadow. He shook his head. "I tell you, sir, it has me distraught."

"Why don't you get a television set instead? I hear they get a good picture nowadays. Ha ha!"

"It isn't the clarity," said Clemson. "I'm not complaining about that at all." He laughed his foolish laugh and went on: "Really, I don't suppose I ever expected to see anything at all."

"You mean you already seen something?"

Clemson opened his mouth and closed it again. He turned cavernous eyes full upon P. Harouchi. When his voice finally issued it was fiercely determined.

"It is possessed, sir! But I think I have a clue, perhaps the answer. It came to me just now. Excuse me please."

He was almost at full gallop as he went around the corner. P. Harouchi was left with his mouth hanging wide open and his gold teeth flashing.

This character was absolutely crazy! He was going to be the only man in the bughouse who owned a crystal ball. Then P. Harouchi reminded himself that Clemson Dell still owed one hundred dollars. Better he should stay out of the bughouse, at least until he had paid it up.

P. Harouchi made a mental note: keep an eye on Dell. If they put him away be sure and get the ball back. Twelve sixty-three was twelve sixty-three.

IT WAS THE very next morning that Clemson came dashing by at ten o'clock. He would never be at work on time. P. Harouchi noted his passage and the time.

Fired; for sure he'll be fired. No boss would stand for a man who came this late to work.

Apparently P. Harouchi was a good judge of the employer's attitude, for Clemson abruptly ceased his daily scurryings to and fro. Outside the store P. Harouchi continued to take the sun regularly. He noted that Clemson now appeared at irregular hours, as often as not in mid afternoon or mid morning.

It was true that Clemson had lost his job. Yet although he grew even thinner he did not seem unhappy. His eye sockets were nothing but skin and bone, but his eyes were those of a man completely absorbed in some fascinating task.

P. Harouchi was concerned. No job, no money. No money, no payments. And where to find another sucker? On the other hand, he told himself, why be greedy? He had already made triple a legitimate profit. And it was still good for laughs.

"Hey!" he yelled, the very next time he saw Clemson.

It was a variation of his usual greeting and for a moment left Clemson in doubt as to who might have called to him. He drew closer and peered at the dealer.

"Oh, Mr. Harouchi."

"Say, what's the matter you're around in the middle of the day? Ain't you working no more? Or maybe you are now in the fortune telling business?"

"To tell the truth," said Clemson sadly, "I am temporarily unemployed."

"Well, too hard you don't seem to be looking for work."

Clemson shook his head. "No. I have been so preoccupied with my crystal ball that I haven't the time." His eyes grew bright. "Sir, it is *amazing*!"

"Oh, you figured it out, huh? And now you see things?"

"Yes. Yes indeed."

"Just busy looking into the future,

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huh?" P. Harouchi chuckled hugely. And some people paid money in picture shows to be entertained! Ha ha!

"Oh yes," said Clemson, missing the sarcasm. "It certainly does give one a feeling of omniscience to see coming events."

"Oh, sure," said P. Harouchi, just managing to keep a straight face. "And maybe the ball told you a good horse to bet on in the races? Or who will win tonight's game between the Cubs and the Giants?"

Clemson frowned. "Frankly, I've been more intent on international events. However, in the room next to mine I heard a broadcast of yesterday's contest and was emboldened to inquire of the ball as to the results of the next game. The Cubs will win, seven runs to five."

"If the Giants heard that they wouldn't even show up at the ball park tonight," the dealer said. "Ha ha! And what will be with the stock market?"

"Why, I've never asked." Then Clemson brightened. "Oh, I did see tomorrow's newspaper. And there was a story on the front page about an impending shortage of steel. The price of steel stocks rose at once."

"Thanks," said P. Harouchi. "Maybe I'll invest a dollar. Ha ha!"

Uninterested further in such trivia as stocks and ball games, Clemson edged away. P. Harouchi let him get three feet away and then crooked a finger.

"Listen. Better get a job. You got payments to make, you know."

"Oh, you needn't worry," Clemson told him. "I forgot to mention that my former employer is giving me another chance. I start this Wednesday, which will be the first of the month."

"Just when the payment is due."

"But I won't be paid until next week. You'll give me that much time?"

"Sure. Anything for a customer." And P. Harouchi heaved a sigh of relief. Ten down and ninety to go. Ha ha!

P. HAROUCHI had a lady friend, as obese and oily as he. She was also a poor conversationalist. However, she was an excellent cook, so he visited her three evenings a week for a late supper. It was cheaper than eating in a restaurant.

Returning homeward by street car that night—he never paid a fare since she lived near a transfer corner where he could always pick up an unused transfer—he read the late paper over his seat partner's shoulder.

The world seemed to be much as usual. Trouble with Russia, trouble with labor, trouble with capital. A movie star was getting divorced, another movie star was marrying. A cat that had been called George for three years had just given birth to a fine litter of kittens.

And so it went, P. Harouchi letting the car's jostling motion bring him ever closer to the man beside him so that he could read more easily. Page one, page two, page three. International, national, local.

Sports. P. Harouchi blinked. There was something here, but what? Not the picture of the girl in the scanty bathing suit, although she was worth looking at. What then?

The headline. YANKS TOPPLE HOSE, 5-2; CUBS TAKE GIANTS, 7-5.

So? P. Harouchi stared, remembered. "Seven runs to five," he muttered.

"Tough," grunted the man next to him. "Don't bet on ball games and you'll have enough to buy your own paper." Ostentatiously, he folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

P. Harouchi disregarded that. His mind was busy with internal dialogue.

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A coincidence, nothing more. Some coincidence, to hit it right on the nose like that. To pick a winner, all right, But to have the score exactly!

So? So nothing. A bigger coincidence. Those things happen.

Nevertheless, it was not conducive to sound sleep. P. Harouchi told himself as he tossed abed that the woman was putting too much garlic in the food lately. Perhaps deliberately. Possibly getting wise to him. A woman would do a thing like that.

Seven runs to five.

He awoke with those two numbers running through his mind, and work pushed them aside only temporarily. Finally he went to the back of the store and got another ball, identical with the one he had sold Clemson. He stared at it. It stared back milkily. Ha! Nothing but plastic with smoke in it!

But when the newspaper truck lumbered past with the late morning edition, P. Harouchi ran his tongue over his lips. Who could tell?

He waited long enough for the newspaper man at the corner to have had a chance to get the fresh edition onto the stand, then sauntered casually past. He paused for a word, let his eye rove nonchalantly down.

He gulped. Bold black type. Conciliator out, strike a certainty. Steel shortage forecast. Stocks zoom in early trading.

He was reading the paper when Clemson came by. Market analysts said those stocks should have fallen under these circumstances. It was unprecedented, unpredictable.

And yet Clemson had predicted it. P. Harouchi smiled pleasantly.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning Mr. Harouchi."

"You look tired. Nothing serious, I hope."

"No, oh no. I was up all night reading the ball."

"So? Anything special going to happen?"

"Oh, I don't pay too much attention to details. The larger implications are the main thing. I wonder whether it is not my duty to give to the world the ball's omniscience. I believe it is."

"Sure! Absolutely!" P. Harouchi leaned closer. "But you know how people are. Better wait until another week, until you are a hundred percent sure. Better not tell anyone."

"You may be right," said Clemson. "Thank you for the advice."

"Not at all. And by the way, if you want to make a check, why not see what'll be with the steel stocks this afternoon?"

Clemson giggled. "I've already done that. Just for curiosity, you know. Steel stocks will fall sharply. However, aluminum stocks will—" he searched his mind—"come forward briskly, I believe the papers will say. Also, rails and chemicals will be bullish, so a commentator will report. Whatever the term means."

"Some crystal ball I sold you," said P. Harouchi with a touch of bitterness. There are magic words, I suppose?"

"Oh no. I simply ask it questions, However—" Clemson tittered again.

"And you go to work tomorrow again?"

"Yes. Well, I must get back to the ball."

IT WAS ENOUGH to drive a man insane! What did they do, print those newspapers by hand? How long did four hours take to go by? And it would be just like those truck drivers to get in an accident and make a delay in delivery.

The truck usually came at three forty-five. At three thirty on the dot P. Harouchi was at the newsstand.

Fortunately for his sanity the

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truck was on time. P. Harouchi snatched a paper and flung a nickel at the astounded newsie. "Here!" It was the first time he had ever bought a paper.

Avidly, he scanned the financial page. Steel had dropped sharply! What else? His eye caught a subhead. Aluminum! It had "come forward briskly."

One thing more. There was a savant of stocks who conducted a daily column, who noted rises of several points in rails and chemicals; who stated, in letters of fire, that they would continue "bullish."

It was maddening! And beyond a doubt it was true. And to think that the man who held all this in the palm of his hand did not have the brains to capitalize on it. He wanted to give this to the world!

P. Harouchi beat his brow. What could he not do with that crystal ball? What could *he* not do?

Why had he told Clemson he would give him more time on the payment? But no, that was no matter either. A man with a job could always borrow ten dollars.

A man with a job! That was it!

P. Harouchi rubbed his face. He stared at the dark ceiling. Very slowly a smile spread across his features. Aha! Oho! Leave it to P. Harouchi.

From his desk drawer he produced his copy of the sales contract which Clemson had signed. He scanned it swiftly. Name, address, occupation, name of employer. *Name of employer!*

P. Harouchi scribbled a phone number, snatched the phone from the desk and dialed. A sweet and practiced feminine voice murmured in his ear that he was now connected with the Russell Spokes Company.

"Let me have Mr. Spokes, please. It's very urgent. And important."

His words and breathlessness produced the desired result. Within a moment's time he had the ear of Mr. Spokes himself.

"Mr. Spokes? You had an employee name of Clemson Dell? Yes? You are going to hire him back? Yes? Take my advice: don't! He was just in my place. He talks like a communist or something. Maybe crazy. Talks about getting even with his boss. Who knows, maybe what a man like that will do.

"Pardon? Oh, don't thank me, Mr. Spokes. I'm a business man myself."

He set the phone down. He stared at the ceiling. He smiled. P. Harouchi was all right, no doubt about that. Ha ha!

INFINITY is infinity. Four hours had been endless for P. Harouchi. Thirty-six hours could not be more endless. Yet by Thursday morning at nine o'clock P. Harouchi had endured eons of unbearable waiting.

"You act like you got the d.t's," he was told by the two burly characters who flanked him as he walked up the stairway to Clemson's room.

"Never mind the d.t's," P. Harouchi snarled. "For ten bucks you can buy enough booze you can both have them. Just do like I tell you!"

He banged at Clemson's door. And without waiting for a reply, banged again. The door opened and Clemson stood staring down at him. Clemson blinked. It was apparent he had not had much sleep.

"Oh. Oh, it's you, Mr. Harouchi. Come in."

No sooner had the dealer entered than Clemson began talking, completely ignoring the other two.

"Mr. Harouchi, I have decided to keep my secret! I have at last realized this manifestation must be an evil one. It should have been plain to me from the first, but it was not.

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Although if you recall, sir, I have always said the ball was possessed. I shall not give it to the world."

"You ain't gonna give it to nobody," P. Harouchi informed him. "As of right this second it's *repossessed!*" He jerked his head at his companions. "Take that thing off the table. And don't drop it!"

"But—! But you can't!" spluttered Clemson.

"This paper says you don't pay on the dot and I can." P. Harouchi waved the sales contract at Clemson. "Without even a court order."

"But you said you'd give me more time!"

"You said you had a job. What happened with it?"

"Why—" Clemson looked bewildered. "Why, I don't know. I appeared ready for work yesterday morning and found Mr. Spokes and two of his truck drivers waiting for me in the office. They literally, sir, threw me out!"

"Tough. All right, boys, take it out. One of you carry it and the other hold the door."

"Please!" Clemson implored him. "I'll pawn my clothing. I'll do anything to pay for it. My whole life has become wrapped up in it!"

P. Harouchi gave him the contemptuous look of the practical man for the dreamer.

"Next time you get something good try to hold on to it," he advised. He slammed the door hard on his way out....

A MAN had to be practical. Something with a fast turnover and a fast profit. Too bad you couldn't get more margin on the stock market. But even so, it was the best way.

Still, even with the stock market there was a way to be smart. U.S. Steel was too high, General Electric also, A.T.&T. even higher. A man couldn't buy many shares. Besides, a thirty dollar stock goes up five points you don't make much. A twelve dollar stock goes up five points and it's almost fifty percent.

The crystal ball reposed on P. Harouchi's desk. In his hands was that day's financial page. His beady eyes roved over the market quotations, picking out the lower priced shares.

Pickwick Papers was quoted at eleven dollars. P. Harouchi looked at the ball. "Tomorrow's quotation on Pickwick Papers," he said briskly.

The milky whiteness of the sphere shifted and glowed. The cloudiness thinned until it was gone completely. And where there had been only opalescence before there was now visible a scene of activity, a huge blackboard with figures in white upon it. And around it the dimly visible shapes of men in motion. The Big Board itself! The New York Stock Exchange!

"Pickwick Papers," P. Harouchi breathed, and looked closer.

Pickwick Papers was down to ten dollars.

He sighed and checked his paper again. Plymouth Shaft and Tube was listed at thirteen dollars a share.

"Plymouth Shaft and Tube," P. Harouchi breathed, and peered into the ball.

One of the dim figures was writing something beside Plymouth Shaft and Tube. The price had changed. P. Harouchi strained his eyes. He gasped.

Plymouth Shaft and Tube was up to twenty-six! In one day this stock would exactly *double in price!* It was a thing that could happen only once in a lifetime.

P. Harouchi lifted his phone and called a brokerage firm. "How much margin do I need to buy stock?" he inquired. "How much down?"

He was informed that he needed at least fifty percent as margin. He glared at the phone. Crooks!

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"Do you wish to place an order?" a voice asked. "Do you have an account with us?"

"If I had an account would I need to ask questions?" P. Harouchi snarled. "Don't worry, I'll place an order. And I'll bring cash."

Money. He needed money. He pulled the desk aside and there was a wall safe behind it. From the safe came a stack of bills. Also a bankbook.

No need to count the bills, but he counted them anyway. No need to check his bank balance, but he checked it. Not bad. P. Harouchi had been pretty clever with his money.

But not enough. He needed more. Where? *Where?* Wait! There *was* something. He would think of it. He *had* thought of it! His insurance!

Again he had the phone and was dialing.

"P. Harouchi speaking," he announced. "I want to cash in my life insurance. How much is it?"

A long wait. He was told. His face purpled with rage.

"Crooks! When it comes to taking, you take! When it comes to giving back, it's a different story!"

It turned out he was getting precisely five dollars more than he had paid in.

But still not enough. He needed every cent he could raise.

"Wait! Don't hang up yet! I got fire insurance on my place. Cancel it as of right now and pro rate it. How much have I got coming?"

This time there was a protest. "Never mind the risk," P. Harouchi barked. "Tomorrow I'll re-insure for double. Just have a check ready for me."

He leaned back. He smiled. Double? *Triple!* Ha Ha! P. Harouchi was on his way.

P. Harouchi, retired millionaire. *Billionaire!* Retired? No, what good was retirement? He had no hobbies. Business. P. Harouchi, business tycoon. That was it. Instead of this small store—what?

He returned his gaze to the ball, which was now milky again. What was the future of the business of P. Harouchi? The ball glowed and cleared. Instead of a small, dirty establishment there now rose a towering edifice of gleaming black slabs. Ha ha!

SO! THEY had looked askance at P. Harouchi. They in their neat pin stripe suits and he in his shapeless serge. But not after he had dumped the pile of money before them.

"All the Plymouth Shaft and Tube this will buy!" he'd said.

Then, a different tune. The broker had been pretty shrewd. Sure, leave it to him. Plymouth Shaft and Tube? Hmmmm. Something stirring there, but nobody knew just what. Perhaps he might advise something not so speculative.

Something he himself wanted to unload, P. Harouchi had thought. Thought he had a sucker, did he?

Well, today they would sing a different tune. Today they would know with whom they dealt.

P. Harouchi entered the vast offices. He smiled left and right to the clerks scurrying about to and from machines that clattered and spat endless strips of tape. Few returned his smile. Well, soon enough they would fight to get near him, to catch a chance hint he might drop.

Ah, there was the head man himself. P. Harouchi came up alongside him.

"Good morning, Mr. Harouchi. Well, sir, your buy created quite a stir. This morning there are rumors of activity to come in Plymouth Shaft and Tube. Something about big Wall

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Street money."

"There'll be plenty activity," P. Harouchi pontificated.

Now there was an increased clacking of the tickers. A clerk came dashing up, spoke loudly to make himself heard above the noise.

"We hold Plymouth Shaft and Tube, don't we, sir? It's dropping fast! Shall we unload?"

P. Harouchi knit his brows. What was this? Aha, he had it. Sure, that was the game. First drive the pikers out, then clean up. Leave it to those Wall Street sharpers!

Another clerk was there now. P. Harouchi ignored the shouted questions that were thrown at him.

"Don't worry, don't worry," he said at last. "It'll go up again."

"You'll need more margin to hold it," the broker said angrily. "Do you have it?"

More margin. More money. Bah, let them wait another minute. He shook off the broker's hand and the man turned red with anger.

"Sell! Dump it!" the broker shouted. But now there was a third clerk.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's too late. They've driven the stock completely off the board. Plymouth Shaft and Tube is wiped out."

SUNK IN dejected stupor, P. Harouchi stared out of the window of the Lake Street car as it rolled over a bridge. Wiped out, the wheels clicked. Wiped out. Wiped out.

A man worked hard. A man saved his money. And those crooks took it from him. That broker had wanted to shoot him besides. He had barely escaped with a whole skin.

Those crooks and that crystal ball! Never again would he even carry one in stock. Well, thank heavens the business was clear. He hadn't had time to mortgage that.

Business, that was it. He'd made it once, he'd make it again.

Now what was going on? Why were they stopped? He heard sirens wailing, then the rumble of the fire trucks as they rolled across the bridge. Ah, now the street car was moving again. Soon he'd be back at work. It would take his mind off his troubles.

Soon, soon. But why so slow? The devil! Better to walk the rest of the way. Only a few blocks now.

P. Harouchi swung off the car and strode up the street, ignoring the traffic that piled up alongside him. People were running. Where? He looked up, stopped. A cry of anguish broke from him.

His store. *His store!* It was *his* store that was burning!

Like a man demented he ran. He shoved, he pushed, he elbowed people out of his way. He was deaf to the curses that followed him. He went on until he ran smack into the arms of a blue-shirted fireman.

"Put it out! Why don't you put it out?"

"Not a chance. Be lucky if we can save the ones next to it," the fireman said. He cursed loudly. "Some forgetful fool must have left something burning. Probably a cigarette or a cigar."

A cigar. And no insurance. Tears coursed down P. Harouchi's greasy cheeks. Through the tears he dimly perceived a gaunt figure close by in the crowd.

"You!" he shrieked. "You and that ball! *You* did it!"

Clemson turned a white face toward him. "The ball is in there?"

"Yes! Go in there too! Burn with it!"

"Perhaps it is better it burn," Clemson said thoughtfully. "It was an evil thing, possessed. You know, Mr. Harouchi, that ball was an awful liar. Everything always came out exactly

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the opposite of what it predicted."

A liar. Exactly the opposite. That was funny. Ha ha! Ha ha! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

"Go in there," P. Harouchi cackled. "Go look at the ball. You'll see something funny. A man named Harouchi is jumping off the bridge and is flying high high *high!* Flying high up *over* the river!"

Still cackling, P. Harouchi turned and ran back toward the bridge.

THE END

ENTROPY IN REVERSE

★ By MILTON MATTHEW ★

THE STORY of the heat death of the universe, wherein all matter comes to some common temperature after unthinkable eons of time, is only a tentative one. Until confronted with evidences of peculiar reactions within nuclear interiors, scientists tended to follow the belief of the thermodynamacists who pointed out that it was quite clear that the "degree of randomness" (which they called "entropy") of all energy relations was continually increasing.

This seems quite reasonable when you notice one fundamental fact. Heat always flows from a higher temperature to a lower one—never the reverse. Generalizing on this observation—scientists believed it to hold true for all matter in the universe. They eventually visualized a time in the remote future when all temperature would have come to a common level. This was often called the "heat-death" of the universe.

But the study of atomic phenomena has changed the picture somewhat. With knowledge of nuclear reactions, it seems that as far as energy relations go we know practically nothing, and while the entropy picture is true within its framework, it may be nullified completely by the blind chance that seems to control the atomic interiors.

Some scientists have theorized that in fact the universe was one vast mass of gas at one temperature, which formed itself into clumps and groupings of atoms. What caused this is unknown but in a way it was a violation of the entropy law. The universe in light of this belief doesn't appear to be the run-down watch spring that it was originally thought to be.

★ ★ ★

IN THE BALANCE

★ By CHARLES RECOUR ★

THE STANDARDS of measurement are three: preserved at a French laboratory and in duplicates in most of the nations of the world are the standard meter, a platinum bar, and the standard kilogram mass; in addition the second of time, reckoned astronomically is also a standard. For the last hundred years these standards have been perfectly suitable for scientific work. Unfortunately they aren't any longer.

A few years ago the mercury 198 wavelength from its spectrum was taken universally as the basic standard of length replacing the platinum bar. This is because this wavelength can be duplicated in any laboratory the world over with tremendous precision and quite simply by heating a certain mercury isotope's vapor. So much for length. That is now standard everywhere.

Mass also requires a new standard. This is being taken care of by defining the mass of an element in terms of its spin and magnetic moment, fundamental unchanging quantities also capable of being duplicated anywhere. Incidentally, this also takes care of the energy unit definition.

And now even astronomical time is not good enough! Scientific instruments are accurate enough to detect the variations in motion of celestial bodies. Consequently a new standard must be found here. It has been. The frequency of vibration of a certain ammonia molecule is the new control for the time standard and the second is defined in terms of this. This too can be produced in a lab anywhere and anytime with exceeding high accuracy. Thus our clocks will depend on their ultimate control through an oscillator instead of "mean Greenwich observatory time."

Since all other technical units can be measured and defined in terms of length, mass, and time, there is no need for any other basic standards. Which we won't personally be affected by these changes, it's good to know that nothing can knock out our units—not even the atomic bomb!

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SHIMMERING BRIDGE

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

THE FAMOUS Tacoma bridge which some ten years ago plunged into the waters beneath after writhing like a twisting snake, has been rebuilt, this time, properly engineered. Most people recall the newsreels showing the bridge in the throes of its contortions, its mile-long span of solid steel beams and concrete twisting and jumping as if it were made of paper. The wind, strong and furious, continually blew against the structure and by the age-old principle of resonance, set it into a series of motions which finally built up into destructive vibrations.

The fault of the structure lay in its design. It was so rigidly and sturdily constructed that it had no "give". Its floor was of rigid concrete and its side spans huge inflexible steel girders. As a consequence it could not absorb the energy poured into it from the wind. After a time it simply destroyed itself, serving no purpose save giving a tremendously thrilling demonstration to the millions of watchers who saw nature's power.

The new bridge is another matter. After careful testing this one has been built with open girders, with a flexible roadbed, with stresses and strains carefully balanced to the winds it will encounter. Every bridge gives and sways under wind pressure, but only one so far has been destroyed by that force under normal conditions. The new bridge even has huge hydraulic dampers which absorb wind shock much like shock-absorbers take blows on a car.

Fortunately the designers of this bridge won't suffer the red-faced embarrassment of their predecessors. This bridge will hang in the air where it belongs—we hope!

GET YOUR WORKSHOP!

★ By W. R. CHASE ★

WITH ALL the excitement being generated by the makers of TV build-your-own kits, another phase of the do-it-yourself business is being overlooked. Increased labor costs have hit nearly every field of human endeavor from home-building to car-building. Americans however are ingenious peoples, being surrounded from infancy on with all sorts of tools and products of an industrial civilization. The first thing an American does, when he can't buy something is to go ahead and build it.

It's being done everywhere and in everything. Not only is it possible today to buy radio and TV kits and assemble them one's self, but all sorts of other electronic equipment is on the market. A number of firms specialize in providing test equipment for the amateur or radio serviceman or anyone else interested in electronics. Thus it is possible to buy vacuum tube voltmeters, signal generators, oscilloscopes, condensor checkers, vacuum tube checkers, power supplies and a host of other sources and instruments necessary to anyone working in the electronics field. And above all these kits, are sold at reasonable prices, approximately half of what one would pay for the equivelant commercially constructed stuff. And they are just as good. It all depends on the builder.

The author had an interesting experience with this sort of equipment. He purchased a vacuum tube voltmeter kit and waited expectantly until it arrived. It was very well packed and protected. All the parts down to the last screw were included in the kit, and the panel face of both the instrument and the meter were attractively designed. Excellent details instructions, accompanied by numerous photographs enabled the construction to be undertaken confidently. On the difficult portions of the instrument, especially the wiring of the rotary switches, excellent explanatory diagrams made the most complicated arrangements quite clear. When the author completed the instrument, it worked perfectly, and he is, by no means, an electronic engineer. It is his intention to purchase more of this kit equipment and gradually assemble a complete electronics laboratory. The next instrument on order is a fine oscilloscope. People find this work fun.

As in any creative activity it is quite a thrill to assemble a piece of abstruse electronic equipment and then see it function perfectly, knowing that you have made no errors and that you have followed the instructions perfectly. In addition the manufacturer usually goes out of his way to see that his product has a professional look so that the builder need not ever be ashamed to show it. Homework of this sort has a great value and we are going to see a lot more of it before long. Grab your soldering irons, boys and girls, we're going to build a TV kit!

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REBIRTH

He hid behind the steel girder as the patrol rocket car came into view...

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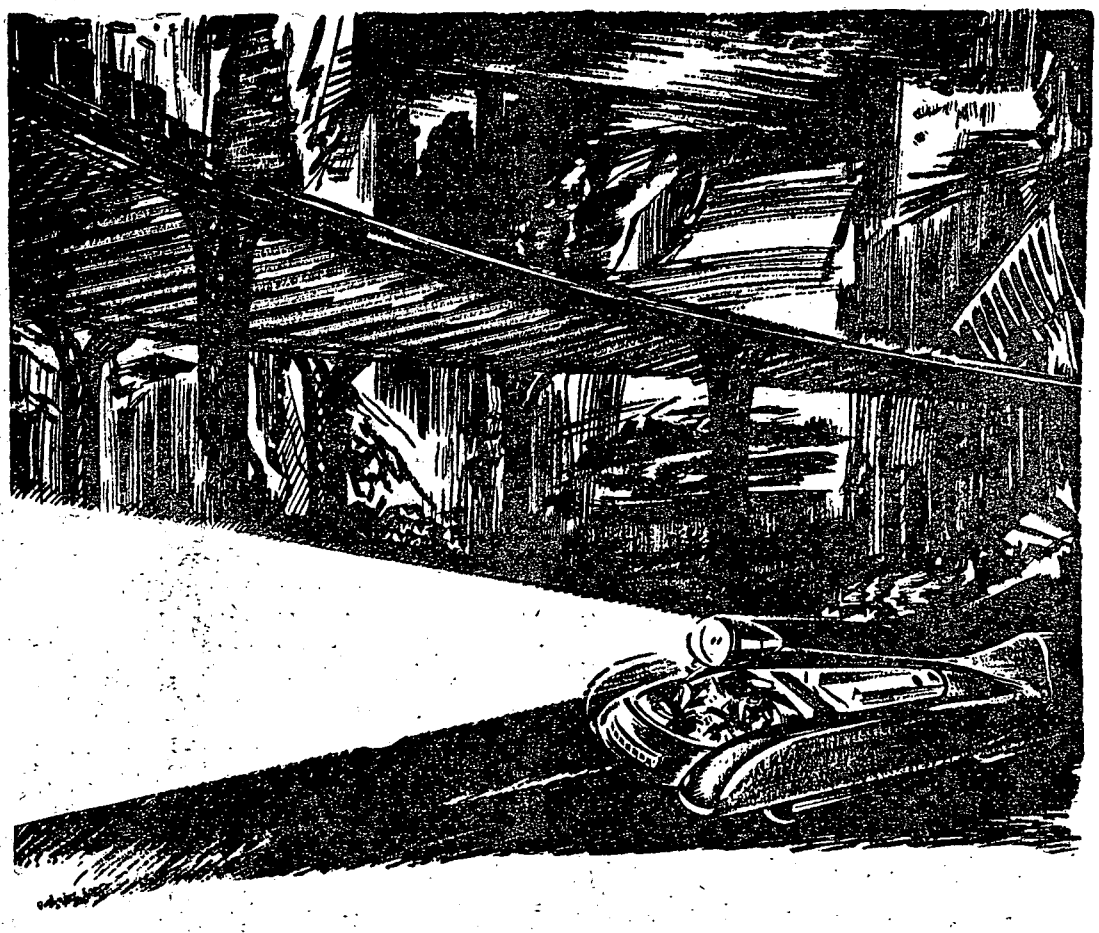

By E. K. Jarvis

In anger, Roker had killed the girl he loved; yet the penalty for his crime was life and happiness—in a new world!

THEY FLUSHED him out of hiding two hours before dawn and he killed one and hurt another very badly with a sliver of poisoned steel from the needle gun. He was firing what were called "quick rot" needles. When they penetrated flesh, they caused the tissues within two inches of the spot where they struck to disintegrate rapidly. In comparison to these needles, rattlesnake venom was a mild soporific.

The PL agents fired a shower of needles at him as he escaped, none of which hit him, because of the belt, which held in special pockets two small but powerful batteries and coils adequate to set up a powerful magnetic flux around the body. Striking this flux, the tiny needles were deflected. This gadget worked very well against the needle guns though a slug from an

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old-time .45 caliber automatic would not have hesitated a second at the magnetic barrier but would have gone straight on through it. But, of course, the PL agents did not use .45s.

Even the needles that they fired were coated with nothing more dangerous than a quick-acting anesthetic.

This fact had always been hard for him to understand. They called him the Dillinger of 1990, they hunted him as Dillinger had been hunted in the old days. If they wanted him so badly, why didn't they use a Tommy-gun to get him? Or quick rot needles?

If you wanted something as badly as they wanted him, you went straight after it, didn't you? And to hell with anything that stood in your way. Going after anything you wanted with both fists and your teeth was the only way to get what you wanted. It had taken him to the top, hadn't it? It had brought him here, hadn't—

A disturbing thought rose in him. Where was he?

Roker knew very well where he was. He was in what was now called Old Chicago, slipping furtively north under the elevated, heading for a place he knew. But going after what he wanted with both fists hadn't brought him here. No! Bad breaks and tough luck had done that. And Marge.

At the thought of her, anger rose so violently in him that it left him shaking and panting for breath. She was the only person who had known he was hiding in that little State-street hotel where the PL agents had found him. She had double-crossed him, she had tipped them off. She had tried for years to get him to give himself up, to seek treatment and when he had refused, she had finally turned him in.

It was Marge who had made him run for his life here in Old Chicago.

What she had done once, she might do again. She knew all his hiding places, she could give the PL agents a complete list of them. And would do it, he did not doubt, unless he stopped her.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and death for a doublecross.

If this faith was old when Babylon was new, Charles Roker did not know it. Nor did he know that when the cities of ancient Sumer had been bright splashes on the plains of Asia, this faith was already old. *An eye for an eye.* Hammurabi had put it in his code of laws. When Hammurabi had been dead for uncounted generations and no one was any longer certain on which green plains the cities of Sumer had been located, this faith had still endured. When Chicago had ceased being an Indian word meaning "a place to skin skunks" and had become a great city on Lake Michigan, in a new world, this faith had still been green and flourishing.

It was the oldest faith that men knew, their shadow of a great rock in a land of sand and heat, their ark of the covenant, their place of refuge, their way of life, their method of doing business. *A tooth for a tooth.*

UNDER THE L, in Old Chicago, in the dark hours before dawn, Charles Roker wound up his spring gun to its highest tension, just to make sure, then moved purposefully northward, to keep an ancient faith. Over there, in the direction of that tall tower which chewing gum had built but which was beginning to crumble now, was where he would find her.

New Chicago lay far to the north, much farther than he was going. It sprawled over the prairies for forty miles, a vast city of small houses set on winding drives among green fields. The dust, the soot, the grime, of the old city, were gone.

Old Chicago itself was going. Holes

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were appearing in the pavement of the Outer Drive, broken windows were showing here and there in the skyscrapers. Dry rot was attacking the old city. In the human animal, values had shifted. Somehow or other the idea had gotten around among some people that skyscrapers fell a little short of the most desirable structural form. Old Chicago was going the way of Babylon, and nobody cared, except the people who still lived in it. The animal which had given value to brick, mortar, stone, and steel arranged in certain shapes had discovered another value system.

To Roker, the change was monstrous, all wrong. He could not understand why anybody would ever want to live out there in New Chicago. As he was halfway across the river, tires whispered on the asphalt behind him. A searchlight groped into the darkness. He threw himself flat. The light went over the bridge, missing him, it went down and explored the river, fingering along logs rising like snagged and broken teeth from the black water, the remnants of old pilings. The light flicked off.

But the squad car back there did not go away. It remained at the south end of the bridge. In the darkness, he could almost sense men feeling for him, listening, wondering if he had come this way already.

Searching for him, they had thrown up a net around the Loop district. But they had reached this bridge a little too late. He began to crawl for the north shore. In the darkness overhead, wings whistled. A jet 'copter was up there. Men in it were also searching for him. He threw himself flat again, waited.

The whistling wings went somewhere else to look.

He reached the end of the bridge, and safety. Later, he reached the place he was seeking. It was a cold-water walk-up on a side street that in the old days had always been littered with paper, boxes, and garbage. It was here he had first asked Marge to move in with him. Long after he had gone up in the world and had become somebody important, she had kept the rent paid on this flat. He had never understood that, but, for that matter, he had never understood why he had always kept a key to this place, even after he had become important. Kept it, still had it.

He used it now.

Except for the creak of boards under his feet as he moved toward the bedroom, there was no sound. But the building seemed to hold its breath and to listen and to watch. He found the light switch, pressed it. The room sprang into soft radiance.

Marge had always slept with her knees pulled up to her chin, she slept that way now, a round ball of woman under a sheet. She had always been slow to awaken, she was slow now. Finally she groped her way out from under the sheet and sat up.

"Charlie?" she blinked at the light, a sleepy little mouse of a woman.

"Yeah. Marge..."

"What is it?"

"Marge, did you tip off them PL agents to my hide-out?" His voice was hoarse, again his heart was pounding, again sweat from the spring of fear inside him was a yellow ooze pushing through his skin. He knew she would tell the truth, she, of all people on earth, had never lied to him.

"Charlie—"

"You did it, huh?"

"Did they hurt you, my dear? Did they frighten you? I'm sorry—"

In his hand, the spring gun throbbed. The needles went across the bed like invisible wasps. She screamed, once.

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HE RAN OUT the front door of the building, caught himself, and went slowly down the steps. A lot of people he knew had been caught for no reason except because they had run. He wasn't going to make that mistake. At the bottom of the steps, he paused, to draw air into his lungs.

Men came at him from all directions. Before he could get that spring gun unto action, they had grabbed his arms and had thrown him to the sidewalk. Other men were running past him into the building. He fought them like a wild man. A car that had been waiting around the corner spun in at the curb, a searchlight beamed down at him. He didn't feel the sting of the hypo gun blasting a spurt of anesthetic through his skin but he heard the throb of air and knew what had happened.

Like a collapsing wall, unconsciousness folded in around him, smothering him in a gray fog.

Sometime later—maybe it was days later for all he knew to the contrary—that fog lifted.

When Roker awakened, he found himself on a hospital table being wheeled down a long corridor. Through the solid glass wall on one side, he could see buildings outside, and a small sign

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LABORATORIES

At the sight of the sign, he almost stopped breathing. In all North America this was the one place that all criminals feared most. Men who were brought here simply vanished. Roker could call to name a dozen whom he had known personally, Hoppy Schultz, Hammer Carrollo, Tony the Florist. What happened to the men who were brought here? Nobody knew but they didn't come back to places like Old Chicago.

This place was the New Inquisition. PL agents were catching all criminals and bringing them here and rubbing them out. More frightening than G men in the old days, more terrifying than an Internal Revenue Department inquiry, was this place.

They had him. But what could they do about him? Now that Marge was gone, there were no witnesses against him. Not one. He had always been careful about things like this. And they could not even pin the death of Marge on him definitely. They had no witnesses to that. Nor could needle gun slivers be traced as had bullets in the old days, the gun from which they had been fired could not be identified. Which was one reason he liked a needle gun.

Without witnesses, what could they do? At the thought, hope rose in him. Perhaps after all, he might continue to live.

The two attendants wheeled him into a large cool room where a man sitting behind a desk was busy with papers. He was a small man, neat, with a calm face. The attendants helped Roker from the wheeled table to the chair beside the desk. The little man looked up and smiled. "My name is Granville," he said. "I'll be with you in a minute. Smoke?" He pushed an inlaid plastic box containing cigarettes across the desk.

Roker's fingers were claws clutching for the box. Behind the desk, Granville did not seem to notice.

"Gotta get myself under control," Roker thought. Everything looked quiet and peaceful in this room but he sensed the existence of danger here. Inside him, deep reflex mechanisms were called hastily into action. Showing fear in a time of danger was a short cut to destruction. Granville looked up.

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Roker got himself under control, got the shakiness out of his hands, got the cigarette lit.

In the manner of a scientist who has watched with interest for a moment the wiggling of a bug impaled on a pin, then has lost interest when the bug stops wiggling, Granville turned back to the papers before him. There was an inches-thick stack of them, Roker saw. Bearing signatures and time stamps, they looked official.

Roker was glad of the interlude. It gave him a chance to get himself under better control.

Granville finished with the last paper. "You are Charles Roker?"

"Am I?" Roker said. If they were going to send him to the gas chamber, they would get no help from him. The biggest mistake a man could make was talking too much, admitting anything.

"You are Charles Roker," Granville continued. The tone of his voice said this was a statement, not a question. "You have also been known as Tom Black and Edmund Wade. Once, for a short time, you called yourself Jim Walsh."

ROKER felt sweat appear on the palms of his hands. "How—" He intended to ask how Granville knew this but hastily changed his mind. Asking such a question was a damaging admission. Granville nodded as if he knew very well what Roker had intended to say.

"You have probably heard of truth serum. During the last two days, you were kept unconscious and given truth serum. Your whole life history was taken from you by this method. I have it all here." He indicated the stack of papers on his desk.

"But you can't use evidence like that in court, you can't force me to testify against myself."

"*Couldn't* is the proper word to use," Granville said. "Once we could not use such evidence. But the laws under which we operate now are rather liberal on this point. We can use this evidence, or any other evidence, including your own admissions."

Roker saw the trap. Or thought he did. They were trying to trick him into admitting something by pretending they already knew it. "You're talking, I'm listening. I'll have my day in court."

"You're in court now," Granville said.

"What? This—court? Where's the jury?"

"I'm the jury," Granville said.

"Huh? I suppose that next you will tell me you are the judge too!"

"Yes," Granville said. "I am also the judge."

"What?"

Granville nodded. "I am the judge."

Fear was a rising wind inside Charles Roker. He was almost too scared to speak for fear he might say the wrong thing. In the desperate circumstances in which he found himself, he could think of only one place of refuge, one hiding place. He ran for it. "I want a lawyer," he said sullenly.

As if this was a reasonable request, Granville nodded. "You have one," he said.

"I have one? Where is he?"

"I am he."

"You're—"

Again Granville nodded. "I am the judge and the jury. I am also your lawyer. And I am one other thing as well—your executioner."

Roker was a wild animal who needed a hole as he had never needed one before. In this place, the cards were certainly well stacked. Judge, jury, lawyer, executioner, all in one man!

Granville picked up the stack of papers. In a calm voice, he began to read a detailed account of every

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crime Charles Roker had ever committed. "And on the night of the Ninth of May, 1990, the said Charles Roker did fire three quick-rot needles into the body of the woman known as Marjorie—"

Roker heard no more. He fainted and thus found the hole he was seeking. It was the only hiding place left on earth for him. Like a gray ghost speaking in a fog, Granville's words came back to him as vaguely he felt himself lifted again to the wheeled table. "I am also one other thing as well—your executioner!"

Dimly he thought: they are taking me to execution. If justice here in this place could dispense with judges and juries, it could also move swiftly to its appointed end. He had no hope of mercy. They knew his crimes. All he had left was a sort of warped comfort that by dying he could pay off for those crimes.

That, too, was part of the law he knew. An eye for an eye. . . . He thought, somehow, with relief that death was coming. An enemy once evaded was now a sought-out friend, his last possible hiding place.

The table moved, stopped. Dimly he heard voices around him. "Charles Roker, alias Tom Black, alias—" The words droned out of his comprehension and out of his hearing.

"Do you have the order of execution?" a second voice said.

"Yes. Right here. Signed by Granville himself."

A moment of silence, then the second voice spoke again. "Well, what are we waiting for?"

"Eh? The man is unconscious."

"What difference does that make? Of course, you can wake him up if you want to—"

"Well, if you say so—"

"I say so. It's even better to have him unconscious."

In this moment deep vital drives inside Charles Roker tried to rouse him to wakefulness. This was his last desperate chance to flee. A scream of protest on his lips, he fought his way back to consciousness and sat up.

Or tried to. Something held him to the table. His dazed eyes sought the source of this final frustration, found it in heavy straps binding him to the table.

A hypo gun in his hand, a white-coated technician was bending over him. He felt the bite of the air driven blast.

His scream went slowly into silence. In that moment, when consciouness was collapsing, he lived again old memories, childhood, infancy, other memories that went back farther still. . . .

WHEN he recovered consciousness, he had the sure knowledge that something had happened to him. Springing from an unknown source, there was a deep sense of vitality inside of him. His mind seemed to float free but it also seemed to be disconnected from his sense organs. Then, one by one, it began to make connections again. The sense of feel came first, perhaps because it was most basic. His kin reported the presence of a cool light fabric over his body and of a pleasant wind that brought with it the odor of cut grass and honeysuckle. His sense of smell had come back.

Didn't that honeysuckle smell good! When he was a kid, a honeysuckle vine had grown in an alley near his home and he had loved the fragrance of the blooms. He hadn't smelled honeysuckle in years, or anything much. The fumes of gas and other corrosives present in the air of the Old City had done something to his nose. But he could smell again.

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Odd, that.

A thud sounded, voices yelled. The sense of hearing was back! He recognized the thud as the sound of a bat meeting a ball and the yelling as coming from spectators urging the runner toward first base. He waited, wondering if the runner was going to make it. Hearty laughter followed. He waited for somebody to scream at an umpire. But no umpire-hating yell came. Just more laughter. Somewhere somebody was having fun.

He lay very still and listened to the laughter, savoring it. Fun. He had never really had any fun in all his life. Other activities had been warped to the point where he had called them fun. But had they been? He doubted it, now.

A door creaked. It was a new, sudden sound very near him. In the old days it would have sent his pulse pounding, his hand streaking for his gun. Now he heard it and turned his head. At this motion, the sense of sight came back.

He saw he was in a small room. The window was open, admitting fresh air and the sounds of the ball game. But it was the open door that held his attention. Granville stood there.

The man was smiling with his eyes in quiet intellectual enjoyment of a job well done, smiling with the knowledge of a job well done, a kind of knowledge that needed no approval from any outside source but was sufficient within itself.

"Hello," Roker said, easily.

Granville moved into the room, stood looking down, smiling.

"You've done something to me," Roker said.

"Yes," Granville answered. "We have washed all, or almost all, of the obscurations out of you. We have taken neurotic warps, the psychotic twists, out of your mind."

"You have done something else," Roker said. "You have forgiven me for all the crimes I have committed."

A glow appeared in Granville's eyes. "If you understand that already, you have made much progress."

Roker was silent. For the first time in his life, his mind was clear. "You did not execute me," he said.

"We do not execute men any longer. We cure them." This was spoken with a quiet pride. "The strongest impulse in every man is toward co-operation. However, in all of us this core of innate honesty becomes obscured. When this happens the individual is non-cooperative and competitive. He wastes himself and he wastes others. All we do here is to remove the neurotic kinks and let the natural impulse toward honesty and co-operation find its own level. We do nothing else here nor do we need to do anything else. Every man has within him the seed of his own salvation." Granville spread his hands in a little gesture which said that the problem of lifting Hammurabi's code from the minds of men was a minor miracle, something which could be accomplished any morning.

"Didn't you really know about this place?" Granville spoke.

"I heard rumors." Now he saw how distorted those rumors had been. The truth had been here all the time for any man to see. Or for any woman. Marge had seen it.

At the thought of her, regret moved in him like a burning flame.

"All of the old world is passing through these laboratories," Granville said.

Now Roker saw why the old city was dying. The inhabitants were coming here. After they had been here, they didn't go back to Old Chicago.

Men had achieved this! Here was the real miracle, that men could have done this! As he remembered them,

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lying, treacherous, vain—them? As he remembered him!

GRANVILLE SPOKE slowly. "We do not believe here in the degeneration of man, we believe in the regeneration of an animal. We do not believe an angel has fallen, we believe an ape-like creature has risen." A deep glow appeared in Granville's eyes. "And we believe he is going to rise farther still."

"How much farther?" Roker spoke.

"That we do not know. But this is only the beginning. This is the first of the psychological laboratories. Others are building now, others are planned. When all of the human race has passed through them, we will know how far we are going to rise." In Granville's eyes the glow deepened. Now his whole face participated in it.

Roker took a deep breath. "Can you, or can any man, forgive me for Marge?"

Granville looked apprehensively at him. But his answer was certain. "Yes," he said.

For a time, Roker could not speak. "I do not deserve this," he said, when he could talk.

"Deserve? The word itself, and all the fringe meaning that go with it, are disappearing from the language. How can you *deserve* anything? We do not buy and sell happiness, we give it away. It is the one commodity on this earth which we can give away forever and still have more of it left ourselves than we started with."

"Could I see her grave? Perhaps, flowers—"

Granville was really startled. "What? Sure. But it will take a couple of days. You lie still now and rest." Granville went quickly from the room.

Two days later, they granted his request. Granville went with him to the cemetery. But when the car stopped in the parking lot, Granville did not leave it. Charles Roker went on alone.

The small granite marker set flush with the ground said

MARJORIE ROKER

SHE HAD no right to this name. They had never been married but had just lived together. She had talked of marriage now and then, when they had been younger, then had ceased mentioning it, as one stops mentioning heaven, a goal forever beyond the reach of groping hands.

To Charles Roker, this was perhaps life's worst moment. All that he had faced in the laboratories was as nothing in comparison to what he faced here. He dropped to his knees.

He had tears.

He shed them now.

And yet even this could be forgiven, Granville had said. But if they forgave him, could he forgive himself?

Along the path that led to the parking area, moving slowly and hesitantly, a figure appeared. It was Granville, Roker thought. He rose to his feet.

It was not Granville. It was—a woman.

Roker stared at her through eyes that refused vision. As she came closer, he could see the scar on her face, a scar such as could have resulted from the hasty removal of a quick-rot needle from human flesh.

Roker choked. "Marge," he whispered. "Marge."

She was in his arms, crying, and he was touching the edge of the scar with gentle fingers and trying to tell her that he was sorry. He remembered the men who had run past him into the flat when he had been caught. They had guessed what had happened inside and had gone in to save Marge,

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if they could.

Arm in arm, they moved along the pathway toward the waiting car. Granville saw them coming and ran hastily to meet them. "Why did you let me come here to face a tombstone with her name on it? Why—"

"For two reasons," Granville answered. "First, in spite of all we do, every man still must earn his redemption. You didn't really earn yours until you saw what was written on that stone. The second reason, we were not quite sure we had actually cured you, that we had reached the deepest source of your trouble—"

"And if you had found you hadn't cured me?"

Granville sighed. "We would have kept on trying."

"And am I cured?"

"Yes."

When they reached the laboratories, Granville got out of the car. He consulted a small notebook. "I have temporarily assigned you two to quarters at 120 Honeymoon Circle—"

"Eh? What?" Roker said. "You mean I am not coming back here?"

"You're all finished here," Granville answered.

Roker looked at the sprawling buildings. Once he had been desperately frightened of this place. But he was frightened no longer. Now these buildings seemed pleasant structures, places where a man might find his soul.

"But where is this address?" he asked.

"In New Chicago," Granville answered. He laughed at them, a cheerful sound in the gathering dusk. The car door slammed. The big car moved away into the coming night. In the back seat, the man who had once been Charles Roker and the woman named Marge sat very close to each other, saying nothing.

THE END

FLYING SAUCER REPORT

★ By JOHN WESTON ★

WHILE THE Korean War seems to have over-shadowed the Flying Saucer Mystery, by no means has the latter been forgotten. This is testified to by the lively public interest being shown in the matter. And a host of magazines and books is being spewed forth by the presses. In addition reports still come in from observers that they have seen more evidence of their existence. It's about time then, for a re-capitulation. Just where do we stand once more, on the Flying Saucer Mystery?

Discounting this unquestionably false rumor of the existence of the so-called "little men whose Saucer crashed in Mexico and whose bodies are secretly hidden by the Air-Force," and coming directly to grips with fact, we can safely and reasonably say this:

A good portion of the Flying Saucer Mystery is essentially sort of a mass hysteria. Some of it is deliberate sensationalism. And some of it is fact. Without a doubt, mysterious, unknown, yet describable disc-like ships have been seen. Too many reliable observers seem to have reported them. On the other hand detailed descriptions so far given do not seem to hold up under thorough questioning. It's always a case of they "looked something like this..."

The Government and Air Force attitudes, a mixture of coyness and serious interest indicates that the reports to a certain extent have validity. The fact that the government is undoubtedly playing with a lot of strange scientific craft like guided missiles lends credence and authenticity to the observers' remarks.

It would seem then that on the basis of the *actual* evidence, there is something to the Mystery. It is possible that they may be extra-terrestrial visitors. It is possible that they may be secret military craft. But beyond those simple statements, it is unfair to go. It is unfair because the data are lacking. Rumors and reports and remarks are not the same thing as physical evidence, detailed photographs, completely verifiable reports. Until these latter are made public (if they exist) or until the ships actually land and contact us, we can only, in scientific objectivity, sit back and wait.

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The MAN WHO HATED

He was drunk enough to see two heads all right, but not one with horns sprouting!

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TUESDAY

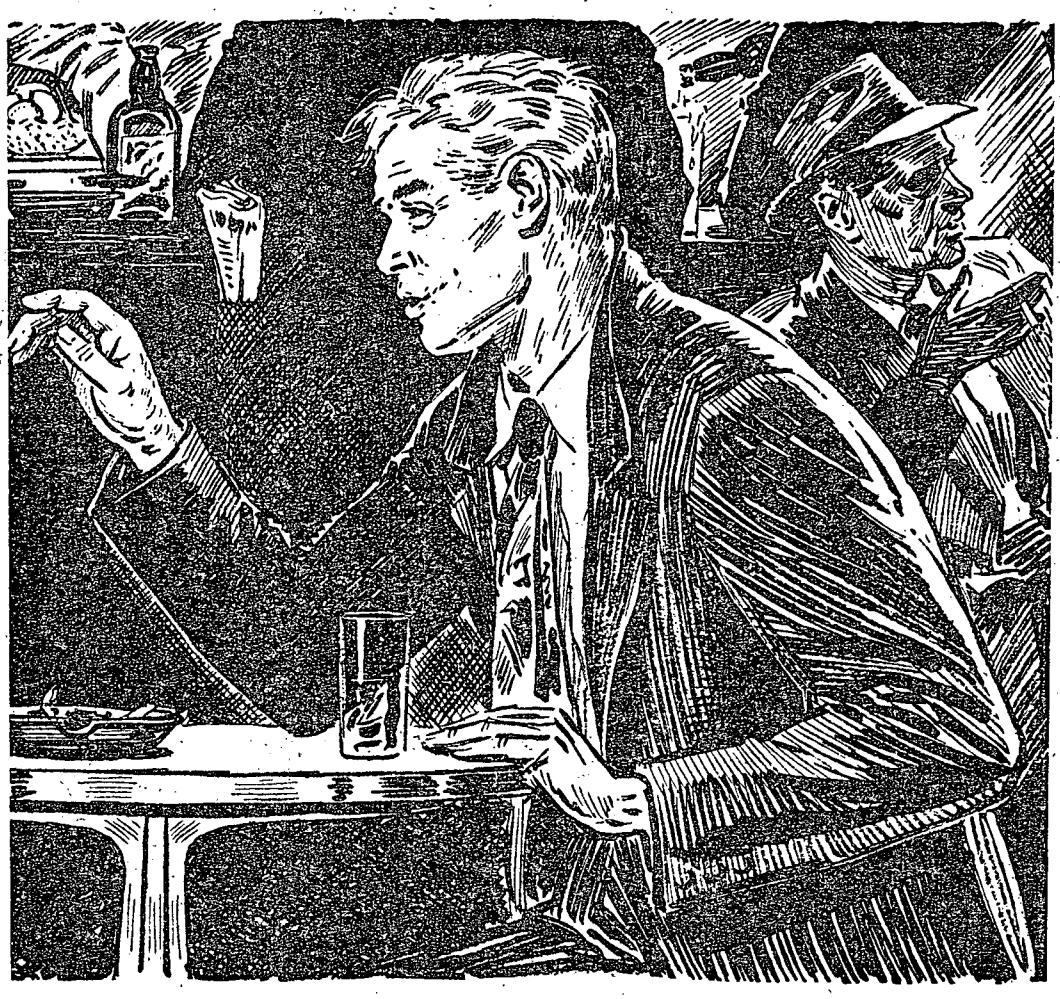
By Alexander Blade

Selling insurance and buying souls have one thing in common — you've got to find a customer who wants the product!

IT WAS A nice clean shave. Almost. He had missed some hair on his upper lip. He smiled at the thought of a moustache. It would be a change. Something different... No! Better not. This was Tuesday.

God! How he hated Tuesday—

He finished shaving and rinsed his face and shortly after was done with his dressing. He caught a passing glance of himself on the way to the door and noticed for the first time



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that fashion was only a word to him. Blue suit, small figured tie, white shirt, brogues, and to top the ensemble, a steel grey hat. The conservative man.

The desk clerk looked up and smiled. William Bingle twitched his lips in an answering smile before he noticed that the smile was not meant for him. Someone else had come into the lobby at the same time and was standing behind him. Bingle tossed his key on the desk, nodded quickly and went on his way.

* * *

The waitress' lips curled downward. "...Eggs, over easy, toast, coffee... Right?"

Bingle bobbed his head.

"H'mm! That's what I like about you, Jack," she continued. "Always know just where I'm at with you." She caught sight of another customer further along the counter and moved over to him.

Bingle could hear their small talk, mostly about sex, and felt a stirring of irritation. Betty never kidded with him. The irritation grew. Betty was certainly taking her time about calling in his order. Darn!

She looked up, saw his eyes on her, turned quickly for a hurried aside to the customer, laughed, then moved along toward the kitchen. Bingle had been the first on the counter. Six other customers came in while he was waiting. His was the last order to come out.

The eggs were underdone.

The toast was overdone.

And the coffee wasn't done at all.

He ate because it was habit. This time, however, the coffee didn't sit well. It wasn't really coffee, merely water with a bean added, a single one. His head stiffened, his lips thinned, and his eyes flashed fire. This was too much!

"Waitress!"

"Yeah...?"

"Would you mind coming over?"

She was as tired as her uniform. "Don't tell me *you're* going to give me trouble, Jack," she said. "Nothin' but all day."

"I—I..."

Her eyes narrowed and her head tilted slightly to the right. That was the way Bet Davis showed annoyance. "So-o?"

The fire died in Bingle's eyes, the lips puffed out in a small pout and the head moved forward slightly. "I—I think I'll have another coffee, please."

HE WAITED for the last woman to squeeze past him on the elevator, then stepped forward. Too late. The starter's hand held him back. The man's indifferent glance passed over him.

"Next elevator, please."

This time he was first in. The Climax Casualty Insurance Company occupied the whole of the eighteenth floor. He called his floor but by the time he got through apologizing for having to push forward the elevator started again. The next stop was the twenty-second.

Bingle walked down.

He went the familiar way until he reached the door marked, Agents Only, and opened it. Immediately he was enveloped in the sight and sound of the place. A dozen men were gathered around the desk of another. Their laughter came to him in waves. One of them caught sight of Bingle, said something in a low voice to the others which made them all turn, and revealed the handsome face of the man behind the desk.

There was nothing wrong with the face, yet William Bingle hated it. Almost as much as he hated Tuesday. He was thankful, at least, that there were six other days. But that face was

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to be seen every day. He had to pass the desk to get to his own. He studied the face covertly as he neared the desk that was the center of attraction. It was handsome in the sense that it had proportion. And there was no denying the features were nice. But taken singly, the features were not nice. The eyes were too cold, the mouth too pretty, the nose made for profiling so that people could call him Barrymore.

But at least it was a face, Bingle concluded sadly, something no one had ever accused him of having. His own was one to be seen and soon to be forgotten.

"Bingle-Bangle himself!..."

Bingle paused and grinned half-heartedly. Sometimes that stopped the ribbing. If only Jack Dix, the owner of the face, would keep his mouth closed.

No such luck.

"You mean Bingle-Bungle," Dix said. He led the laughter which followed.

"How do you mean, Jack?" one of them asked, the one who had started the ball rolling.

"You mean you didn't hear what happened to old Bingle the other day? Well, let me talk, man. This is rich. Bingle gets himself a fine lead, guy named Hendrix..."

Bingle felt the blood flood his face. There was no one but Gladys Sims who knew about Hendrix. She must have told Dix—

"...Seems that Hendrix is bugs on fish, any kind. Bingle gets squared away on that hobby until he knows it all around. Then he makes his call. Hendrix turns out to be a guy about my size, only not so husky, lucky for Bingle. Well, Bingy starts sawing on fishing; how he caught a muskie in Wisconsin, and a trout in Colorado, and a sailfish in Florida. But Hendrix is sitting quiet as a mouse waiting for Bingle-Bungle to finish. Our boy feels real proud when he's done. Feels the customer ought to be in the bag.

"Then Hendrix hauls off and tells Bingle where to head in. Seems Bingle got the wrong steer. Hendrix is an amatuer ichthyologist, a fish collector, hates game fishing. Bingle gets thrown out on his pratt."

There was a roar of laughter, in which William Bingle joined in a small way. "Yeah. That was pretty good," he said. "Gladys Sims gave me the tip on Hendrix. Guess she didn't get it right."

Dix's eyes became watchful. "Gladys is pretty but that vacuum she carries around up there. Man!..."

"That isn't a nice thing to say about Gladys," Bingle said.

"No? Maybe you think she's an Einstein, huh?"

"I didn't say that, but it's not nice."

"Bingle," Dix grinned up at the other, then winked to the rest, "what day is this?"

Bingle knew. Tuesday! He also knew what was behind the innocent question....

A NEW VOICE joined the talk, but this one was the voice of authority. "Gentlemen! Shall we go into the Conference Room...?"

It was Henry Adams Adams, the General Manager of the Sales Division of the Climax Casualty Insurance Company. He stood framed in the doorway of his private office, a tall fleshy man, with the manner of an autocrat, and the mind of a rug peddler. Only a fish's eyes were colder.

The group around the desk broke up, and singly or in twosomes followed the figure of Adams into the conference room. The last of them was William Bingle, a medium sized

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man in dark conservative clothes—

"Gentlemen," Adams held up a fleshy palm, "our daily meeting. Mr. Bingle will preside, this being Tuesday. Now, if you will excuse me?"

Yes, Bingle thought as he stepped to the small rostrum at the rear of the room, this was Tuesday, all right. The damndest day in the week. The day when he had to stand up here and face these hyenas and deliver his small talk on some phase or other of insurance. He wondered why, and could only think of one reason. Seniority. He knew there wasn't a man on the sales force who did not write better than a hundred thousand a year more than he. Yet though there were some fourteen of them he had been one of those chosen to deliver one of the series of daily talks.

Tuesday was his day of torture.

He cleared his throat and silence fell. But it was the kind called pregnant. Bingle knew how swiftly it would fall to pieces once he began to talk. He cleared his throat again.

"Uh, gentlemen."

Their grins grew broader.

"I, uh, want to talk about, uh, annuities..."

"Nice things to have," a voice observed, from the rear of the room.

It was the opening shot. The talks never lasted more then ten minutes, but those minutes were torturing. He smiled weakly. "Yes, they are. But, uh, they're sometimes difficult to, uh, sell."

"How would you know?" another asked. "You ain't never sold one."

"Because," this time it was Dix who spoke up, "he can't spell the word, that's why. Right, Bingy?"

Bingle felt the walls draw in on him. They all knew what Dix meant. Bingle couldn't talk to anyone. The moment the man or woman he was seeing began to bring up arguments against insurance Bingle felt his inadequacies, and backed away. But he could compose excellent sales letters. So it was he made his living in the insurance business. He would write to his leads and when they would answer, one or another of the agents would call on the accounts. If a sale was made they would split the commission with Bingle. Lately the splits were no longer fifty-fifty. It had been Dix who had demanded a larger split for himself. The others followed.

"It doesn't matter whether I can spell the word or not," Bingle spoke with sullen defiance. "They *are* hard to sell."

"You made your point," one of them said. "Go on."

Go on? What else was there to say? Darn it! He had a beautiful talk all set up in his mind before he started shaving. Now he tried to bring some small part of it back.

Nothing.

"Well... Just like Mr. Adams tells us, we've got to get on the ball and sell insurance. We've got to talk..."

Their laughter stung him. He wiped his face of the sudden perspiration, rubbed his throat with quivering fingers and smiled with pleading lips. Finally the horrible sound stopped.

"Keep talking, Bingle. You're doin' fine."

The room swam before him, veiled in a mist. Unbidden tears stung his lids. He knew in another moment he would become vocal in his crying. A grown man, crying out loud.... Then he was running past them and out of the room.

He was almost to the door leading to the corridor when he was stopped by the voice of a girl. He slowed, turned his head and saw a pretty face crowned by a wealth of brown hair. There was a faint smile on the girl's mouth but it wasn't like the smiles of the agents. Hers was pleasant and

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inviting. He went to her.

"Bill! You weren't going to go without saying hello? Besides Mr. Adams asked to give you this."

It was one of the pink memos the General Manager gave out as an assignment on a definite called lead. This bore the name of a man, Jerome K. Warren. Mr. Warren was a vice president in the firm of Superior Milling Ltd.

"He wrote to Mr. Adams and asked to have you stop up to see him. He's at the Boyden House, room 2345. There's a ten o'clock appointment for you, Bill. I do hope you..." she stopped.

"Yes, Gladys?"

"Well, I hope you make the sale, Bill."

"Ah!" said the voice of Jack Dix. "Our pal Bingle-Bungle's got a pinkie. Gonna study this one's hobbies, too? Better let me handle him, pal. You'll lose him for sure."

"Mr. Warren wrote in and said he wanted to see Bill, himself, he was so impressed by the form letter Bill sent," Gladys said.

"That's what I like about Gladys," Dix said. "Gets so lost in sympathy she can't find her way out. But don't worry, Bingle, Jack Dix never leaves a pal down. I'll see to it she gets to see the light. All of them. How about tonight, baby? I got a pair of tickets for that new revue in town, and maybe we'll Chez Laverne afterward? What say?"

The girl's eyes went wide. "You mean that big hit show from Broadway...?"

"That's it, baby. Look like that and I'll forget the stars on the boards for looking at the stars in your eyes."

William Bingle didn't have to hear the answer. It was a sale, from the first words....

JEROME K. WARREN was in. The desk clerk had an odd look in his eyes. Bingle wondered why but thought no more of it as he stepped into the elevator. Point by point he went over what he was going to say to Warren. He knew the letter he had sent the man had been one he had prepared for people in Warren's position. The premiums ran extremely high but on that kind of annuity the insured had no worries.

The elevator stopped with a gentle shudder and Bingle found himself in a long corridor. Room 2345 was at the far end of it. He knocked at the door, first timidly, then with more determination. There was a radio blasting the Godfrey show. Quite suddenly the door opened and a face popped out at Bingle.

He stepped back in alarm. The face looked mad. Blue, staring eyes looked blankly at him, heavy lips were opened to reveal a mouthful of synthetic porcelainware. A fog of alcohol enveloped him.

"Friend or foe?" the face asked.

Bingle took a single backward step. "I beg your pardon."

"Beggar, eh? Gonna complain to the management," the face said, and withdrew hurriedly behind the door which slammed with a crashing note of finality.

Bingle swallowed. He hadn't expected this. Once more he rapped.

The face returned, and with it a body, short and stocky, and attired only in shorts, top and bottom, the feet dressed in a pair of the wildest Argyles Bingle had ever seen. Below them a pair of green suede shoes completed the ensemble.

"Mr. Warren?" Bingle took the plunge.

"Tha'ss me, Jerome K. Warren. Who you?"

"My name is Bingle."

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"Friend of foe?"

"Friend," Bingle replied wearily. He tried to think of a single sales point. Blank.

"*Friend!* Come in friend. Never thought I'd find a friend in thish city. Hotel's full of drunksh. Me too. Gotta shelebrate. You got a friend and I got a friend." He smiled in blissful content. And suddenly reached out with a paw and took hold of Bingle's jacket and dragged him forward and kicked the door closed behind him.

He pushed Bingle down in a club chair, then staggered to the dresser. A bottle and a pair of water tumblers stood beside a water pitcher. He picked up the bottle and one of the glasses and as he tipped the bottle upside down over the glass, he said:

"Wha'ss say the name wash?"

"Bingle. You wrote to my company, the Climax..."

"Fine—company—My—namesh—Warren. Wha'ss yoursh?"

"Bing..."

"Croshby?" there was awe in Warren's voice. "Well, thish ish an honor. Bing Croshby. Wait'll I tell Bertha about that. Have a drink, Mr. Cros-Croshby. Mind if I call you Bing?"

"No," Bingle said wearily. "The bottle seems to be empty, Mr. Warren."

Warren looked dreamily at the bottle, then flung it through the open window. Seconds later there came the tinkling echo of its landing.

"Know shomething, Bing. Gotta shelebrate. No bottle, no Bertha... My wife. Nishe gal. Glad she's home. You just sit there, Mr. Croshby-Bing. Be back."

BINGLE took note that Warren occupied a bedroom suite. A wealthy man, Mr. Warren. Also a man who loved the bottle. Once William Bingle had been tempted to take a drink but had changed his mind. For some reason he hated drunkards. The reason, he knew, was Dix, who had the reputation of going on some classic benders, but also had the reputation of being at his charming best when that way.

Bingle sighed. He had an idea that Mr. Warren was going to be a problem, but a problem to be solved. Selling Warren an annuity could mean a lot of money. But the obvious was that Mr. Warren was also a lover of what came in bottles, and not Cokes, either.

His introspection came to an abrupt end with Warren's dramatic appearance. Bingle should have been prepared by the man's taste in socks. He was wearing a pale green suit a lavender shirt and a hand-painted tie. But at least he was dressed.

Warren bent a happy smile toward Bingle, waggled a finger at him and said: "Let's go, Bingy. Hoo-ha! Wait'll I tell Bertha about thish..."

By the time they reached the door Bingle was bathed in perspiration. Warren insisted on introducing him to one and all as his friend Bing Croshby. Warren staggered wildly as they came through the revolving doors, and Bingle grabbed him before he sailed into the street.

"Mr. Warren, please be careful. I think perhaps a cup of coffee will do more good than the other stuff."

Warren shuddered and gave Bingle a piteous look. "Onsh a year I come Shicago. Get away from Bertha, have fun. Coffee don't make fun." He gave Bingle another of his rapturous smiles. "Lesh shelebrate. 'Kay?"

"Very well. But it's rather early."

"Never early for shelebrate. Know jush the plashe."

Mr. Warren's speech was becoming as unsteady as his gait.

For an instant Bingle almost gave up the idea of trying to sell Warren. Then he thought of the grins which

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would greet him if he returned without even a promise for a return call. No! He was going to stick with Warren, no matter what happened.

But in that second he had let go of the stocky man's arm. He looked up in time to see Warren climbing into a cab. His belated shout stopped the driver. He crawled in beside the other. Warren's owlish eyes peered blankly at him.

"Who're you?" Warren asked.

"I'm Bing, remember?" Bingle said as he settled himself into the seat. He knew now this was going to be a day among days to think back on.

"Bing. Bing Croshby himshelf. Wait'll Bertha hears about thish. In my cab. Shay. I got a great li'l idea. Le'sh go to the Pink Canary. Got everythin' there. Barsh loaded with whishkey."

THE PINK CANARY was an evil little dive in a small hotel on the near North Side. Early as it was the bar was filled and people spilled into the small back room. There were two girls for every man, and every man had two girls. Except a very fat man seated by himself around the bend of the bar, near where a piano stood on a small raised platform.

The instant they entered the foyer of the hotel Warren took the lead. He stood in the doorway for a second, hooted loudly and plunged to the bar, dragging Bingle behind him.

The bartender was a small man with a lean handsome face. He smiled guardedly and wiped the bar before Bingle and Warren with a damp rag.

"What'll it be, men?"

Warren puffed out his cupid's bow mouth so that the words came out with an explosive force: "Who wantsh men. We want women!"

The bartender grinned tiredly. "Take your pick. What'll you have to drink?"

"V.O. and water. My friend'll have the same." He leaned forward until he was standing tiptoe and motioned the bartender to bend his ear. Warren's whisper was heard the length of of the bar: "The Bingo himshelf, right with me. Pershonal guest."

The bartender stuck out a thin lip. "That so?" He smiled again. "Looks more like one of Bing's bangtails."

Bingle felt he ought to be angry, but now all he wanted to do was get away as soon as possible. It had suddenly come to him that Warren was going to be difficult when he discovered Bingle didn't drink.

He watched the bartender pour the drink and set up the glasses of water. An ice cube dipped up and down in the water. "Mix 'em?"

Warren nodded.

The bartender looked questioningly at Bingle, who smiled and shook his head. To his surprise the bartender picked up the ten-dollar bill Warren had laid on the bar, and turned and rang up the drinks on the register. Bingle had assumed his head shake would be interpreted correctly.

Warren turned to him, raised his glass and said: "Luck, Bingy, and down the ole hatch."

Bingle watched the glass tip until only the cube remained. His own glass was still on the bar. Warren caught sight of it as he turned again.

"Thass not nishe, Bing," he said. "Inshult, thass what it ish."

Bingle knew it was now or never. If he refused Warren, he felt sure, would become insulted, and if he drank, well, Bingle hadn't the slightest idea what the consequences would be.

He drank.

Liquid fire down his throat. Bingle gasped, choked and gulped the whole glass of water. A strange and pleasing warmth settled in the pit of his stomach. So that was what happened when

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you drank whiskey? H'mm! Not bad...

Suddenly there was another glass of the amber-colored liquid before him. This time it was he who raised the glass.

"Here's how," he said. He remembered dimly, that was what the toast was. Or words to that effect.

"Who?" Warren asked.

"I said here'sh, I mean here's how."

"Oh..."

The second drink didn't burn quite so much going down. The warm feeling at the pit of the stomach followed almost immediately. Not bad at all. Pleasant, in fact. Bingle concluded he had been missing a great deal by not learning about this whiskey business sooner.

He became aware of a strange look on Warren's face. He smiled but the strange look remained. Perhaps, Bingle thought, Warren needed a drink. Certainly, he needed one.

"Bartender." He thought he sounded just the right note.

"Yeah?"

"Another drink, pleash." He wasn't conscious of the slurred word, this time.

"Another? There's one there now."

Bingle looked down. So there was. He wondered where it came from? Once more he lifted the glass and turned to Warren. The stocky man was frowning. Suddenly Warren slammed his hand on the bar.

"Knew it! Knew it! You ain't Croshby. No sirree." There was petulant anger in his voice. Suddenly his mouth quivered and tears rolled down his cheeks. "What'll Bertha shay? Why'd you do it?"

Bingle patted the heavy shoulders, after he swallowed the whiskey. "There, there. Don't feel bad, friend. Mishtakesh happen. Never shaid I wash Croshby. You did."

But Warren was no longer interested. He had found a more willing listener in the strawberry blonde seated alongside. The bartender was already pouring a drink for her. Bingle sighed. A pity. Nice man, Warren. Ought to carry insurance. Ought to talk to him about it. Everybody ought to carry insurance. He sighed again. He realized suddenly that he was alone at the bar. Every other person there had a friend of one kind or another, except himself.

And the fat man in the corner.

Strange floor, he thought as he made for the corner. Strangest floor he had ever walked. Was made in waves. He took careful steps. Didn't want to get seasick. Even rowboats made him seasick. Ah! Made it—

"MY NAMESH Bingle," he said as he dragged a stool close to the other's.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, sir," the fat man said. He had a hoarse, jovial voice.

Bingle had the odd notion that the laughter was hidden somewhere in a secret place.

"Wonderful plashe, thish," Bingle continued. "Never realished how neshneshessary plashes like these are."

"I see you are a philosopher," the fat man said. "How nice. I am one, also."

Bingle thought it over for a second, but decided it was a waste of time. Besides, it was time for another drink.

"I would conshider it an honor to buy you a drink."

"Thank you, sir," the fat man replied with studied courtesy. "But allow me."

This time the drink went down as though it were oiled velvet. Bingle smacked his lips loudly and beamed at his new-found friend.

"So you are a philosopher?" the fat man mused. "Whom do you fol-

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low, Immanuel Kant?"

"Can't? Can't what?"

"Immanuel..."

"Can't Immanuel? Never heard of it."

"Schopenhauer, then?" the fat man persisted.

Bingle's eyes were owlish in their intent regard of the moon face beside him. He decided it was a nice face. But he wished pettishly that the face would stay still. It seemed to waver....

"Old hat, eh? Can't say I disagree," the fat man went on. "But then I have a philosophy all my own. Care to listen?"

Bingle nodded mutely. He looked away from the other and smiled widely. Such a nice bartender. How did he know a drink was in order? He must have, though. There was one before him again.

"You won't laugh?" the fat man asked.

"Promish," Bingle said, then downed the drink. He made a slight face. This one had gagged him somewhat.

"Has to do with souls. You believe in a soul, I hope?"

"Shertainly. No man's shoul hish own. Alwaysh shaid that."

The fat man was startled. "Wonderful. We are, shall we say, in rapport...?"

"'S all righ' with me," Bingle said.

"Good. I'm of the opinion that a man has more than one soul. Matter of fact I've investigated. Man has three souls. One soul for his childhood, and two for his later years. Now listen closely."

Bingle suddenly became aware of a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach. How could he listen closely, or even loosely, with an upset stomach. That was asking too much. He tried to concentrate on what was being said.

"...Therefore one soul is in domination at a time," the fat man concluded.

Bingle was sure he had missed something. He didn't care. The queasy feeling was becoming more positive and worse, assertive. The fat man suddenly became aware of it. An odd smile played about his lips.

"Come now, my friend," he said. "You need help. Bartender."

Three of them came forward. Bingle was sure of it. He giggled. Ask for one and you get three...

"I think our friend here, needs a little something to settle his stomach. Would you mix these ingredients, please?"

ALL BINGLE got of the mixture the fat man ordered, was something called Benedictine. But whatever it was it tasted very nice. And presently, the queasy feeling was gone.

"As I was saying," the fat man went on after Bingle finished the drink, "men have two souls. Take yourself, for example. And if I may be allowed to point out, the wrong one is in domination."

"You mean you can shee it too?" Bingle demanded.

"It's too obvious. A pity."

"What's a pity."

"I could help you. That is if you want to be helped?"

Bingle considered the matter for a moment. What had he to lose? "Go ahead, help me."

"I want the soul in domination. I need it. It's small, quite the smallest I've ever met, and the meekest. Just right for the man I need it for. But let me explain. This man is more proud than I, more aware of his own strength, more certain of his own glory. It is not right. It would be the greatest jest to give this man the most humble soul I have ever met, when

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he comes to meet me face to face."

Bingle caught the drift. He was being ribbed. Just another who saw him for what he was, the meekest of the meek. A feeling of sadness took hold of him. If only he had a single spark of courage? But that came from within, from the soul. He had practiced being a small man for too long to change in a moment. Well, might as well go along with the gag.

It came to him that he was quite sober, and conscious that he had been very drunk only a few moments before.

"What do you want?" he asked.

The fat man answered through a smile: "Your soul. I will buy it from you."

"It won't come high," Bingle answered.

"No matter what the price, I will pay. As I said before, I am a philosopher. The core of all philosophy is to accept what is offered, until a better comes along, but never to believe in it."

Bingle mulled that over. It made no sense to him. But the rest of it struck a chord. Well, how much was his soul worth? He tried to set a price on it. It seemed silly.

"Surely," the fat man broke in on his thoughts, "there is something you want, something you wish for. Nothing ridiculous, understand, or petty, like all the money in the world, or possessing all the women in it, but rather something that would in a single sweep, change your whole life. Ask it."

"Make me love Tuesday."

"A strange request. Granted. A bargain. Your dominant soul in exchange for making Tuesday a lovely day. Shall we drink on it?"

The instant Bingle swallowed the whiskey he knew it was a mistake. Too late. Now there were three bartenders again. And once more the floor had that strange tilt to it. He grinned vacuously at the fat man.

"Funny," he said. "Washn't we talkin' about something deep a minute ago?"

"Philosophy," the fat man replied. "It has a habit of going to one's head, like whiskey."

"Now tha'ss real clever. Gotta remember that. Nope! No use. Can't remember nothin'. Funny. Can't remember nothin'. Who're you?"

It seemed that the smile on the fat man's face curved so wide it swallowed first the ears, then the nose, and finally the whole face. Bingle worried how that could be until sleep took him with his head burrowed in the hollow of his arms.

"WAKE UP, Jack...."

William Bingle stirred, then groaned. He lifted his head and looked bleary-eyed at the lean, handsome face across the way.

"Boss don't like bar sleepers. Better go home and sleep it off."

Bingle shook his head, but only once. He was positive a second shake would snap it off completely. It did serve, however, to clear his mind of the whiskey fog. There seemed to be a memory, although a dim one, of having been in a deep conversation with a fat man—

The bartender shook his head. "There was a fat guy sitting here all right, but he left a minute or so after you got here. You and he chewed the fat for maybe a couple of seconds."

But now there was a far more important remembrance. Jerome K. Warren. What had happened to him? This time the bartender was more explicit.

"He was all right. Wound up buying everybody at the bar drinks. We poured him in a cab an hour ago, broke but happy. Kept asking for you. Said his wife would be disappointed if he didn't bring Bing Croshby home

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with him."

Bingle slid from the stool, staggered wildly for a second, but recovered before he lost his balance. He waved a limp hand at the bartender and walked out. The sun was low on the horizon. He was amazed that the day had passed so quickly without his being aware of it. Well, it was too late to see Warren now. Besides the stocky man was probably in no condition to be seen. Which brought his own condition to mind. He knew one thing about drinking. It made a man awfully sleepy.

He hailed a cab and went to his hotel—

* * *

He studied the face in the mirror and nodded abruptly. It wasn't such a bad face. Maybe a little too lean to be called rugged, yet not so pretty as to be called, feminine. No, it wasn't such a bad face at all. Better than Jack Dix's.

He fingered his upper lip, dark with a day's growth of beard. He narrowed his eyes and turned his head this way and that, trying to visualize how he would look with a moustache. Quite suddenly he made up his mind. He was going to grow one!

He stood for a long moment at the open closet, searching the clothes rack. Now there was a pair of beige slacks... The dark brown jacket would go well with those. He had no suede shoes, but there were a pair of crepe-soled leather ones.

Not bad, he thought as he surveyed the man facing him in the mirror. Brown suited him well. Better than blue. He caught sight of the hand-painted tie he had received as a Christmas gift two years before, and which now lay against the gabardine sport shirt he had put on.

Very sharp....

He started past the desk clerk but stopped as the man called to him. Bingle remembered then it was Wednesday, the day the bills for the weekly rates were made out. He went back to the desk.

"Here," the clerk tossed the bill to him as if he felt dirtied by the touch of it.

Bingle spread it out. Twenty-two fifty a week for a room off the elevator shaft, next to a man who smoked marihuana and who had the weirdest dreams from which he would awake screaming. And on the opposite side, directly across the way lived a man and wife who found a strange pleasure in beating each other up at least once a week.

He remembered how he had asked the hotel manager for a different room and the reply... "What do you expect for twenty-two fifty, a penthouse?"

He had lived in this hotel for three years now. And knew that he was being overcharged. Badly.

"What's this for?" Bingle asked.

The clerk gave him a worried look. "Your bill, Bingle. What does it look like?"

"I know what it looks like! What's the matter, Grand afraid I won't pay?"

The clerk said nothing. But a whitish tongue stole from between his lips to lick at them.

The words seemed to come, unbidden: "You tell Grand I'm fed up with that flea-trap! Understand?"

The clerk gulped. There was respect in his voice: "Yes, sir."

A LONE customer was at the far end of the counter. Betty, the waitress sidled over, her hips moving in what she hoped was a sinuous walk. Her pencilled brows arched in studied weariness. "...Eggs, over easy..."

He cut her short. "When I want

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eggs I'll ask for them. A small steak, fries, rye bread and a cup of coffee, now!"

Her face seemed to fall apart. Even her voice wasn't the same. She seemed in shock. "Steak . . . Fries . . ."

"What do you want, a picture? You heard me. And I'm in a hurry, so don't sit on it. Let's get on the ball."

She jerked back away from the counter, and for an instant rebellion flared in her eyes and voice: "Hey! Who you think you're talkin' . . . ?"

"Not your twin. On your way, hasher."

His lips curled in amusement when he saw her draw a cup from the fresh side of the urn. The steak was just right, and the potatoes not too crisp. It was the best breakfast he had ever known. He dropped a quarter on the counter as he left. There was something in her eyes that told him she was sorry to see him go, an awakened interest she had never thought possible. . . .

* * *

There was room for one more on the elevator. The starter brought his hand up only to find it shoved aside.

"Excuse me," Bingle said as he brushed past the man. He gave the elevator a cold look and called his floor in a tone that said, "And I don't mean the seventeenth or nineteenth, either."

The elevator stopped and Bingle shoved hard against the man and woman in front, brushing them out of the elevator. He did not even go to the bother of apologizing for his actions.

The curled lip curled higher as he paused outside the familiar door. Then he was shoving it open and stepping through. The first person he saw was Gladys Sims. She was talking to Jack Dix. Bingle moved directly to her desk.

"Hi, baby," he said.

She looked up, startled at his greeting. Dix's glance was merely puzzled.

"He still giving out with the big-talk?" Bingle went on.

The girl barely repressed a laugh, though for the moment she wasn't sure at whom it would be directed. The lamb was sounding like a lion. Worry worked its way into her blue eyes. This wasn't William Bingle the butt of the force. It couldn't be! Maybe he was drunk . . . ? Her eyes went wide.

"Well," Dix said slowly. "Wha hoppened, Bingle-Bungle? Someone give you something to sniff?"

"Nothing I could sniff could chase the stink I get from you," Bingle replied. "Surprised how much of it Gladys can take."

Patches of scarlet burned in Dix's cheeks. He was given to the use of a cologne that was meant more for the opposite sex. The whole office knew it, but no one had ever had the courage to kid him about it. Not Jack Dix.

"What's the matter, don't you like it?"

Neither Gladys nor Bingle missed the edge to his voice. The girl's face paled. Bill Bingle was drunk! Or crazy. She had better put a stop to it before Jack got too mad.

"Please, Jack . . ."

"You stay out of it!" he said. This time his voice was flat.

"No way to talk to a lady," Bingle said. "And don't use that George Raft voice to me."

"No? And suppose I do?"

"It'll sound awfully funny coming out in a lisp."

Dix didn't get it. He wasn't conscious that his head shook for an instant.

Bingle didn't bother to explain. Somehow he knew he had won a victory. He had seen Dix's head shake,

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and had seen the shadow of bewilderment come into the other's eyes. To tell him that people without teeth lisped would have lessened the shock, and led to more talk.

HE BLEW the girl a kiss and continued past Dix. He didn't know whether the other agents had been listening or not, nor did he care. He no longer cared what they thought. Yet he could not help but be aware of their glances.

There was an inter-office memo on his desk. Adams, the Manager, wanted to see him directly after the sales meeting. He tossed it into the waste basket. He knew what Adams wanted to see him about. No use thinking about it till he faced Adams.

"Gentlemen," Henry Adams Adams' throaty voice drew Bingle's face upward, "shall we go into the Conference Room...?"

The only one who didn't go was William Bingle.

He waited until Adams came out; the Manager waited only till the agent who was to do the talking got to the rostrum, before leaving. Adams stopped short at sight of Bingle.

"Mr. Bingle. What are you doing out here?"

"You wanted to see me; Mr. Adams."

"I thought I told the girl to say, *after* the meeting?"

"She did. It was on the memo."

"Then why...?"

"This is Wednesday. Listening to Jack Dix tell how good Jack Dix is can be very boring after a time. I know that record so well I can almost repeat it from memory. I think what we have to talk of is more important."

Adams passed a hand over his fleshy face in a speculative gesture. This was like having snow on the Fourth of July. He motioned with his head for Bingle to follow as he made for his office.

"Now then, Bingle. How did you make out with Mr. Warren?"

The suspicion Bingle had formed when he saw the memo was now confirmed. He could say he had not been able to contact Warren, or say that Warren wanted more time, or tell the truth.

He told the truth.

The trouble was Adams did not believe him. "*You* got drunk? Mr. Bingle!"

Bingle smiled. "Incredible, eh? Truth, though. Got stinko. Bad as Jack Dix gets sometimes."

Adams flushed. Dix's love of the bottle was a sore spot with him. If Dix weren't a quarter-of-a-million-a-year-man Adams would have fired him years before. Still, there was no cause to throw Dix in his face like that.

"Mr. Bingle," Adams used his softest tone. "I think you are well-aware of my feelings about the personal habits of my agents. I don't care what they do or are, so long as they sell insurance."

BINGLE KNEW what that particular tone meant. The velvet covering the steel fist. The trouble was, he thought, no one ever felt the steel fist. He wondered about it. And from wondering, fell to speculating. He decided suddenly to find out.

"A bad policy," Bingle said. "A drunk can only sell another drunk, insurance. As for pressure selling, another of your favorite beliefs, an agent loses more sales than he makes."

"Bingle," gone was the velvet touch, and the formal manner. "When I want your advice I'll ask for it."

"Now that isn't what you tell us, Mr. Adams. 'Got a problem, come to me, or a suggestion. I'll always give my boys a fair hearing.' "

Adams bit his lip. What Bingle said

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was true. He had said it. But he had never thought his words were to be thrown into his face. That was going too far. But there was more to follow.

"I got drunk yesterday. First time in my life. I think it did me good. What's more I'm going to get drunk once a month. Know why?"

Adams waited in a brooding silence for the answer.

"When I come out of it I see how much the fool I have been. Does a man good to look into a mirror now and then and see himself as he is. But to get back to Jerome K. Warren. I'm going back and see him, and sell him the biggest annuity policy we carry. He needs it."

Adams looked like he had swallowed something which did not agree with him. "Er, Bingle, I had it in mind to give the Warren lead to Dix. Of course you and he would split the premium, understand?"

"Too well. Why should I split the premium with Dix or anyone else? I made the lead, I want to follow it. What's more, I can sell it, too."

"Think so, huh? Okay. Sell it. But if you don't..."

Bingle understood. He would go back to working a debit in a neighborhood, go back to peddling we-pay-the-funeral-accounts.

"MR. WARREN doesn't want to talk to anyone, sir," the desk-clerk warned.

"Get him on the phone. He'll talk to me," Bingle said.

He used one of the house phones and after waiting a moment Warren's voice came on. It sounded like gravel rubbing gravel. "Who the hell is this?"

"My name is Bingle. I'm with the Climax Casualty..."

"See me another time. Don't bother me today."

"All right. So you don't want to see me today. But the least you could do is apologize for yesterday." Bingle said.

"Yesterday...? Oh, no! You weren't the guy I got drunk with?"

"And left sleeping over a bar. The least you could have done was put me in a cab."

"I'm sorry about that, pal. Things got kind of dim for me after a while. Tell you what. Come on up."

This time the shorts were Nylons, top and bottom a pale lavender. Bingle caught a glimpse of the bedroom and noticed the bottle of pills on the dresser. There was also a bottle of some pink liquid. Bingle had an idea the liquid was Pepto-Bismol.

"Oh, Lord! Tell me, do you feel as lousy as I do. I swear my head's off somewhere. It sure as hell don't feel like it's attached to me." The effort of talking was too much for Warren. He fell into the club-chair as if he were drained of his strength.

Bingle used the inside ledge of the window for a seat. "Ever wonder why you drink, Mr. Warren?"

"Sure. Makes me forget business. Let's talk about something else. My mouth is full of that dark brown taste."

"That's why I'm here, to talk of something else. Annuity insurance. I wasn't just shooting the breeze when I asked you what I did. Too much business pressure is ruining a lot of men these days. Take the pressure off with an annuity policy. How old are you."

"I'm glad you're not asking me to think. Not with my head somewhere off on a flying saucer. Forty-five. Why?"

"You can retire in ten years if you want to. Think of it, not worrying about the future, after you're fifty-five. Plenty of good years ahead. Keep going the way you are and..." Bingle shrugged his shoulders, as if to

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say, who knows?

"Say. I know who you are now," Warren said. "You're the man who sent me that fine form letter. H'mm! Well, okay. Tell me all about it...."

WILLIAM BINGLE patted his brief case fondly as he walked along the street. Jerome K. Warren was all wrapped up on an official-looking paper within the case. Adams was going to sing a more respectful tune, now. And so were all the rest.

Adams was curious. "Mind if I ask what the devil happened to you, Bingle? I can't believe you're the same man."

Irritation crawled up and down Bingle's spine. Why did Adams have to bring the devil into it? Yet the itch of a strange something he couldn't quite remember, irked him. It was the kind of itch for which there was no scratch.

"Well, you know about the worm who decided to turn...?" Bingle said.

"That's different. The worm was still a worm. You're altogether different. As if you were another man."

"But a better one," Bingle said in reminder.

Adams said nothing to that, and Bingle got the impression of a reserved opinion. He wasn't bothered by that. Already the future was beginning to unfold for Bingle. Adams' phone rang and Bingle found it an excuse to leave. He wanted to get back to his desk and plan for that future.

The voice brought him up out of the deep study he had fallen into: "Bill. What's happened to you?"

It was Gladys Sims.

Now it was she who wanted to know what had happened to him. He wished she would mind her own affairs. What the hell. She didn't like him the other way, and now that he had changed, she didn't like him this way.

"Nothing!" she caught the sharp note in his voice.

"I see. I'm sorry I asked."

"Forget it," he was instantly contrite. "I guess I decided to stop acting the lamb."

She smiled. "You were a nice lamb."

"Lambs always wind up getting clipped. I'd rather be a lion."

"Like Jack Dix?"

"I've got teeth."

She stuck out her lower lip and the gesture gave her the look of a puzzled child. "Be a nice protecting lion, Bill."

"I haven't made up my mind what kind of lion I'll be," he said. "One thing I *know*. You'll never have to worry about my claws."

She wondered as she went back to her desk, why she felt the shiver of fear race down her spine when he said that.

IT WAS ALMOST five by the time he composed the last of his letters. He read them through, and was pleased with what he had done. J. J. McAuliff, the president of Climax Casualty was also going to be pleased. Good old Adams! Had he not called him in, the great idea would not have been born. Of course, Bingle realized, Adams had not used the words which spawned the idea. The words were Bingle's.

He placed the three letters in a folder and put the folder into his brief case. He looked up to find Jack Dix standing in front of the desk.

"Look, Bingle," Dix spoke in, what was for him, a gentle voice. "I don't know what kind of goofy ideas you've dreamed up about you and Gladys, and about how big a shot you are because you've sold a big annuity deal. But let me give you a tip. Stay out of my territory. You'll get stepped on, but bad."

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Bingle measured the other with coldly contemptuous eyes. "Your feet aren't big enough to step on an ant, Dix. Your trouble is that you've no idea of size. The only territory you control is the Conference Room, and that only on Wednesdays."

"Don't say I didn't warn you," Dix said.

The instant Dix turned, Bingle forgot him. There were more important things to think of. The reception of the first letter, for instance. Bingle felt pretty sure that it wouldn't be tossed into the waste basket.

He couldn't wait till Tuesday came around, now....

IT WASN'T until Friday that Bingle was made aware of how much he had changed, and more important to him, of the change in his relationship with the other personnel of Climax Casualty. He had sold between Wednesday morning and Friday night, a million and half dollars worth of annuities, the premium stock of all insurance.

It was a record never approached by any agent.

The afternoon was half gone when his phone rang. It was the manager, Adams. He wanted to know if Bingle could stop in for a moment. Bingle hid the elation in his voice. He knew precisely why Adams had called.

"Sit down, Bingle," Adams motioned toward the chair by the side of the desk.

Bingle made himself comfortable.

"I got a personal call from J. J. today. Called me from New York to tell me he would be in for the Tuesday morning Conference."

Bingle said nothing.

Adams bit his lip. Little sparks of fire flamed in his eyes, and set aflame the words he spoke: "You're a pretty smooth sort of jerk, aren't you?"

"You want to talk to me, don't use that kind of language. I'm not one of your flunkies."

"Not mine, eh, Bingle? Maybe J. J.'s?"

Bingle shrugged his shoulders. "Just thought I'd give him a suggestion. Didn't charge anything for it."

"Not now. But you *do* have a price in mind. My job, maybe?"

Bingle's laugh was not a pleasant sound. "*Your* job! No, Adams. I don't want your job. You can keep it."

"Thanks for nothing."

Bingle's hands spread wide then fell to rest on his knees again.

"Ever think that you might get fired?" Adams asked.

"It used to worry me," Bingle confessed. "Now I'm going to let it worry you."

A shiver of unreasoning apprehension shook Adams. Damn this man! What did he mean?

BUT BINGLE didn't explain. The silence lengthened unendurably for Adams. "You're right, though, about not firing you," he said at last. "Much as I've come to hate your superior guts, you're too valuable a man to fire."

"Besides which," Bingle pointed out, "you make a commission on every policy I write. And the ones I've written are chicken feed to the ones I'm going to write." He got up with a sudden movement. "Don't get so excited about me, Adams. I'm not after your scalp. Unless you cross me, of course."

Adams nodded. "No. I guess I like money as much as the next man. But you're not interested in the money. I know that. All right, Bingle. I'll play ball."

"Of course you will," Bingle said. He turned with his hand on the knob. "Until you make your first error."

The door closed softly behind

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him—

It wasn't till then that Adams remembered he hadn't told Bingle why McAuliff had called. Yet Adams was of the opinion the other knew....

* * *

J. J. McAuliff looked like anything but what he was, the president of one of the largest insurance company in the country. He was a tall stooped man in his middle sixties. He wore nothing but salt-and-pepper tweeds, imported from Scotland. It was said that he had two suits, one a brown mixture and the other a grey. He was wearing the grey as he sat up on the rostrum.

He peered over the edge of the silver-framed spectacles at the group of agents gathered below. Adams and his assistant were also present, as well as the managers and assistants of the other branches in the city. Standing a yard or so in advance of McAuliff was William Bingle.

Bingle held up his hand in a signal for silence.

"Gentlemen," he began. "It is at the request of Mr. McAuliff, the president of our company that I am making this day's talk." He paused, turned and nodded to the man in the grey suit, then faced the audience again. "Mr. McAuliff feels that when a man writes a total of four million dollars worth of insurance in less than a week, that man has a message of importance for every man in the company.

"I have.

"It is a rather simple one. Too many of us have thought of insurance as a commodity. It isn't. It's a way of life..."

That was the first point to shock them. But it wasn't the last. He had them sitting on the edge of their chairs before he was through. At the end he knew he had them all in the palm of his hand. And with that consciousness he was aware of the reason for all this.

Power. That was what it was. For others to know his strength, because it was so much greater than theirs. Strange words suddenly impinged on his memory... "...Make me love Tuesday..." Well by all that was unholy, this *was* the loveliest Tuesday he had ever known. And there were going to be other Tuesdays. Fifty-two of them through the year. Before he was done with them they would know who was boss. Even J. J. McAuliff. Bingle was quite aware of the impression his talk had created in the old man.

There had been applause. He waited until it died before raising his hand again. "Gentlemen, I think it would be fitting and proper if Mr. McAuliff said a few words at this moment."

McAuliff spoke in a Scotch brogue. But the sense he made was hard, every-day American. He echoed everything Bingle had spoken of. And at the end, said: "...This is a proud day for me, as it should be for all of you. For William Bingle, a man who started as an agent, at the very bottom of the ladder, will tomorrow be in charge of the entire Midwest territory..."

For a second there was only stunned silence. The applause which followed the announcement was desultory and brought a pucker of surprise to McAuliff's brow. The puckering was erased as Bingle shook his hand and said just the right thing, in just the right way. Then Bingle was facing the audience again.

"Men! Just because I have been given this great opportunity, don't think I will forget you. *I will still be here every Tuesday morning to give my little talk on insurance.*"

There was not an agent who did not realize then, how deep his hatred of them lay—

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WILLIAM BINGLE studied his face. There were new lines in it. He forgot them in his consciousness of what else he saw. His eyes, once merely pleasant, were now sharply penetrating. His mouth had thinned and was now a little bloodless. His nose was curved, flaring like that of a horse.

He smiled and it came to him that his smile was always crooked now.

William Bingle, in charge of the whole midwest for Climax Casualty. Not bad. But only the beginning. The little ideas he once had were big ideas now, but much closer to reality. He thought back on the meeting the day before. The smile grew broader. They knew what he meant. He was going to make them pay, one and all, for the derision and misery they had heaped on him through the years. One and all... He couldn't wait till Tuesday. A full week away. A full week.....

God! How he hated the rest of the week!

He dressed with care, matching his ensemble with practiced eye, He wondered idly, where he had gotten the sixth sense which told him what to do. What difference did it make? So long as he *knew*.

He looked around the room. Only a week before he had been living in the shabbiest room in the hotel and paying premium prices for it. Now, for the same money, he had the best. Power. The kind others were quick to recognize. And pride, too. They wouldn't dare give him anything other than the best, now.

He started for the office but halted at the curb. He didn't have to go, if he didn't want to. Besides, this was Wednesday. Now if it were Tuesday....? He hailed a cab.

The address came easily, as if from long practice: "Ohio and State."

It seemed as if he hadn't been gone for more than a few minutes. The bartender recognized him.

"Hello. How've you been?"

"Fine. V. O. and water please."

Bingle told the bartender to mix the drink and while the man poured the whiskey into the glass of water, Bingle looked around the bar. No. The fat man was not to be seen.

He played with his drink, drinking it in slow careful swallows. Finished at last with it, he ordered another. "Say. Remember the fat man I was sitting with last week?"

The bartender looked thoughtful. Then his head shook once. "Yeah. He comes in once in a while. Might even be in today."

"Think so?"

"I don't know, but you never can tell."

An hour and three drinks later Bingle's vigil was rewarded, although he had actually not seen the fat man enter. Bingle had turned for a casual glance to the corner, and there the man was. Bingle arose and carried his drink to where the other sat.

"Remember me?" Bingle asked.

The heavy, leaden lids drooped, then came up again. "Yes."

"Good. Then you won't mind answering a couple of questions about the day we met?"

"I won't mind."

"First off, who are you?"

The fat man smiled. "A philosopher. You said you were one also."

"A funny thing about that day," Bingle said. "Things that were said and done are not clear at all. They come to me in odd flashes. Things like you promising me something about Tuesday."

"Oh, there was a promise, all right. We've both stuck to it. Tuesday was to be a lovely day..."

"And what did I promise you?"

"Nothing. You merely gave me one of your souls in exchange for my help."

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Bingle felt a tingle along his scalp. This man was mad, coldly and unemotionally mad. Gave him one of his souls. What nonsense was this?

"Tell me," the fat man asked. "Was Tuesday a lovely day for you?"

"The best I've ever known."

"You see," the fat man crowed in delight. "I told you it would be. Every Tuesday."

Anger tore itself loose from Bingle's heart. "Yes. Every Tuesday's going to be. But now the rest of the week is an unbearable infinity. I can't wait the days out. I hate the rest of the week."

The fat man hunched his shoulders. "Let us look at this in a philosophical light. Had you mentioned the rest of the week and asked me to make them all sunny...?" Once more the heavy shoulders heaved. "But you didn't. Don't feel badly about it. Every Tuesday you are king of all you survey."

Bingle slammed his glass on the bar with such force it shattered. "You forced me into that bargain. The next bargain I'll make the terms."

"Perhaps," said the fat man, and smiled more widely. It stayed on his lips even after Bingle left, as if it had been pasted there.

BINGLE went directly to the office. Now he had a suite of rooms private to himself. The first official act of his occupancy had been to make Gladys Sims his private secretary. He had imagined she would be delighted. To his surprise she acted as if she wanted to refuse.

She was at the Sound Scriber, making a disc of a letter he was sending to McAuliff. She looked up on his entrance, saw the anger in his eyes and turned away.

"Gladys!" he called her.

She turned again and noticed he was now at his desk. "Yes, sir?"

"In the privacy of the office you can call me Bill, as you used to. Turn it off."

He waited till she was done. "Now then. Tell me the truth. How great a change has there been in me?"

She weighed her answer carefully. Yet, though she knew the answer really didn't matter, she tried to spare him: "You've done so much in a week it seems incredible. A week ago you were a rabbit running from the hounds..." She stopped, knowing what the simile would follow into.

He urged her on.

"...Now you're the hound trying to run down *all* the rabbits."

"I told you last week that I was a lion. Well, I'm wrong."

Hope came slowly to life in her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Gladys, a lion is only the king among beasts. I am going to be a king among men. Will you be my queen?"

Her eyes fell before the passion she saw in his. "I-I can't answer you, today."

"I should ask why not, but will make excuses for you. Very well. Another day then. Not too far off, though."

"No. Not too far off." It was a promise.

HE WASN'T conscious of the passing of time, only of the slowness of each day's death. How he hated the new-born day. How he hated to move with it in its course. Each hour became a lifetime, the most hated he had ever known. Six days, each as the Tuesdays he had once known.

He had become so wrapped in himself he no longer was conscious of anyone else, not even Gladys. Day by day his tyranny became worse, and day by day he made more and more money for the company.

It seemed the hatred directed against him was in direct proportion

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to the success he was making. He gloried in it. He drove the agents with a relentless fury and scornful words that were worse than physical beatings.

He never attended a conference, however.

But the strangest of all the things which was happening to him was brought to his attention by Betty, the waitress. It was Saturday again.

She stood as far from the counter as was possible. Her eyes watched his own with a fearful intensity. He caught the look of fear in them.

"What are you so scared about?" he asked.

"You."

The reply made him wonder. "Don't be. You're not the kind of rabbit I like to chase."

"That's why," she said. "You talk about rabbits like they're people. You come in here now and act like God Almighty and me, I'm worse than the dirt on the floor. Well, I ain't, see."

"I see. What are you, then, an equal?"

The anger she felt was on the tip of her tongue, but shoving it back in her throat was a fright even greater than her anger. Her face worked in uncontrollable jerks as she struggled against her fear. "I ain't dirt, see. I'm a human being, too. I got rights."

His eyes flickered on and past her. It was as if she no longer existed for him. She got the full meaning of what his glance meant. And suddenly the anger was greater than the fright.

"You devil! You damned devil! Get out of here. Get out before I kill you." She screamed the words at him.

He said nothing. Nor did he even look at her. She was panting in wild gasps. "I know what's the matter with you. You ain't got no soul, that's what."

He knew then she was right, knew he had to see the fat man again—

THE FAT man was in his favorite position, wedged against the wall, at the far end of the curved bar. Bingle knew he would be there.

"My friend," the fat man said softly. "I hoped you would come. Jack, there, knows all about people. But we, we know all about souls, eh?"

"Not quite all. What about mine?" Bingle asked.

"Yours? Now don't worry about it. It's being carefully taken care of."

"Why?"

"Forgotten so soon?"

Bingle wet his lips. "Tell me. What do they call you, my fat and repulsive friend?"

"A drink before I answer?" he waited gravely for Bingle to answer, and at the other's nod, called the bartender: "Jack. A little of the bottle to make us merry."

The fat man lifted his glass and clinked it against Bingle's. "To philosophy and philosophers, they show us the shapes of all things." He smacked his lips and put the glass down. "You asked what I'm called. Various things, at various times."

"And at this time?"

"The fat man. I don't know why people think of me as being lean and hungry-looking. I have all a..." he paused, went on: "devil like myself needs. Except for a soul now and then, of course."

"More of what you said the first time we met, comes back to me. Something about a man who was more proud, more scornful, more aware of his power than you. Now that I think of it there seemed to have been a note of fear in your voice."

The great moon face became perfectly still.

"Who is this man?" Bingle continued.

"He will know when we come face to face. This I will say. It was destined we meet from the very begin-

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ning."

"Like ourselves, for instance," Bingle said.

"Precisely."

"Suppose I should want you, fat man? Where can I find you, other than this bar?"

"You will know what to do," said the fat man. "Of that I am sure."

"I find your fairy tales about souls very interesting, fat man. We all have three."

"You have but two," the remark was a pointed one.

"I forgot. Is it gone forever?"

"Or until I get one or another of the two you have left. I may return it then."

"Which one do you want, fat man?"

"I'll let you know when the time comes."

THEY WERE all alone, he and Gladys. He had planned it so. She finished transcribing the dictation he had given her and was bent over the typewriter. He took hold of her spun her about to face him.

If he had expected fear in her, he was disappointed.

"Gladys. Look at me. What do you see?"

"The shell that formed around the man I loved."

"No."

"You're not the only one who has changed this past week. When you became this other person, Bill, you affected the lives of all of us. It seems impossible that I was such a kid only a week ago. So excited about going to a revue and the Chez Laverne. Bill, did you ever smell fear? It's all over the place, like an invisible fog. And the minute you leave it seems to leave with you."

"Listen to me, Gladys," he said in quick reply. He let her go and stepped away from her. "It's like a tumor eating at me. The whole world must look up at me. But when I ask myself why I don't know. Is it because the stings of their laughter went so deep? I know they mean nothing to me, Gladys. But you, you're the world and beyond, now and forever. I want you for my wife."

And once again the single word: "No!"

She could feel the power emanating from him as though it were something physical. "We will see. Good night, Gladys."

* * *

Tuesday.

The second one. He thought of what he had planned to say. Today they would stay a full morning, listening to him. He opened the door a crack and peeked out. There they were, clustered around Jack Dix's desk, as usual. Quietly.

He smiled in anticipation. Then he caught sight of Gladys coming and he closed the door quickly and gently. He was at his desk when she opened the door.

He waited until she was at her desk. Then: "Poor fellows. I feel sorry for them. Imagine having to listen to someone like me for three hours? Sheer torture. Well, it can't be helped. The talk I prepared is *so* long. Didn't realize it till just now."

She couldn't take it any longer. "I'm quitting, Bill. Right now. I can't take you any longer. In the name of Heaven, what's twisting you like this? What's gotten hold of your soul? You're like a devil."

The solution to the whole thing came to him in a flash. The one word she used. *Devil.* He knew now why the fat man was interested in his soul.

"Don't quit just yet, Gladys," he said. "Not till after the meeting. Now please go and leave me alone."

He waited until the door closed behind her. Then he threw his head

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back and broke into fierce talk, sounds which came out in a whisper: "You filthy, horrible, spawn of everything evil. I know you, fat slug, cloven-hoofed one, whose tail drags in the muck of your foulness. I know what you want. A bargain, once more. My strength for the weak soul you took from me, my pride for the simple soul you took from me, my scorn for the kindliness of the soul you took from me. A bargain evil one..."

"An even exchange, really," said the fat one.

He was there in the room. Bingle shuddered.

"Ah, well. I didn't think you would hold out long. Frankly, the remaining soul was not for you, anyway. You look best, dressed in blue, and sound best, stuttering, or making foolish sounds. Strength is too foreign to you, pride too rich, scorn a shabby cloak. The soul I took is the only garment you should wear. Take it and welcome."

A haze floated up in front of William Bingle. When it was gone, the fat man was gone with it.

But Bingle had no memory of him.

He narrowed his eyes. There was something he had to do. Of course. This was Tuesday. Strange. He used to hate Tuesday. He wondered what had happened to the hate. He opened the door of the office and looked out. The agent's room was empty. Well, there was but one other place they could be.

He wondered at their stillness as he walked in. No grins, no outright laughter? He noticed that Gladys was on the rostrum, a pad on her knee and a pencil ready to go to work. He smiled shyly at her, and thought to remember to ask her what she was doing there. Then he was facing the agents.

"Er, I think maybe, uh, we ought to talk about, uh, the newest phase of health plans to be, uh, made available. Now, let me see..."

HE WAS completely unaware of the change in the faces of those listening. At first there was respect, tinged with fear. But with his opening remark their faces fell apart. Dix was the first to sense it. His mouth was suddenly grinning widely. One by one they followed Dix's lead.

"Uh," Bingle went on, "there are some figures available. I think I can remember them."

Raucous laughter rolled up at him. He stopped and looked down at them. The laughter stopped. "Did I say something funny?" he asked. "I didn't mean to."

Even Dix paused for an indecisive moment. Then he took the bit in his teeth. There was a debt he owed Bingle, a debt he was going to pay. "Well, Bingle-Bungle wants to know if he said anything funny? All he's got to do is open his silly yap."

Gladys paused in the midst of her stenography. Something bothered her and she wondered what it was. When Bingle spoke again she knew what it was. He was talking as he used to, and not in the stilted manner of the last couple of weeks. He even looked different...

"Do you think you could close that yap, Dix?" Bingle asked.

"Yeah. Any time you say."

"If one of you gentlemen will close the door...?" Bingle said.

He removed his jacket and handed it to Gladys. "I don't know whether I can," he whispered, "but I'll give it a try."

"Darling," she whispered in return, "I think you can. No. I *know* you can!"

"That's better." he stooped suddenly and kissed her.

It was the first time. He made a mental note to do it more often. Then

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Dix was shuffling toward him. Bingle lashed out with his fist, met empty air, and felt something like a wall hit him full in the face. The room spun crazily and he seemed to fall for a hundred miles before the floor cushioned him.

"Aw," he heard a voice say. "Don't quit now. The fun hasn't even begun."

He nodded sagely and managed to get to his feet. Dix was waiting for him. This time Bingle waited for Dix to come in. Once more he lashed out at the handsome face before him, and once more it wasn't there. Something dribbled from his left nostril. He snuffled it upward and staggered erect again.

Dix waved him in. He could hear voices as from a distance, voices which were asking someone to stop something, but he wasn't interested. There was but one thing he *was* interested in. Beating that handsome face before him, to a pulp.

This time Dix didn't duck. It was his first mistake. The shock of the punch was a delicious thrill racing along Bingle's arm. Now the face was not wavering as it had been. It was nice and clear. Bingle took careful aim and let go. The face fell away from his fist. And quite suddenly he was looking down at it.

"Get up," William Bingle said. "You're one up on me. Come on."

But no amount of pleading could get Dix to his feet. It was a lot safer on the floor, and less damaging—

* * *

"Darling," Gladys rubbed her finger down the length of his nose, "are you still a lion?"

He gave her a blank stare.

"And are the rest, rabbits?"

"Have you been drinking, Gladys?" he asked.

She looked away for a second. When she looked back there were stars in her eyes. "No. But I feel drunk. It's so good to have you back, dear."

He didn't know what she meant, but why worry. Especially when the most wonderful girl in the world is kissing you—

THE END

NERVE CENTER . . .

★ By JUNE LURIE ★

WITHOUT fanfare, and quietly, most major cities in the United States are organizing themselves in accordance with the suggestions of the government as given out in their latest release on defense against atomic warfare. While we hope that day will never come when such measures must go into action—we can't be sure and we must be ready.

The defense net for Chicago is a typical example of what is being organized. In the basement of a large science museum in Chicago (formerly occupied by the Atomic Energy Commission for the area) a huge plotting board is being readied. This plotting board is designed to absorb the reports of thousands of aircraft spotters located on the perimeter of the city. Large numbers of trunk lines lead into the building and just as the Londoners plotted the German raiders, so will this plotting board record the progress and location of aircraft in the Chicago area.

Manned by volunteers, this plotting board is really a secondary adjunct to the main defense unit—a radar station. Somewhere (it is highly secret) in the Chicago area, hidden is some elaborate camouflage in a complete short and long range radar station employing the latest radar equipment. The information delivered by this station coupled with that provided by the volunteer civil unit, will be able to great work in the eventuality that the city is struck from the air by a potential enemy—from the North!

Canada too, is preparing its cities in a similar fashion. Consequently reports from its cities will be available to the Chicagoans and other New Yorkers and Detroiters etc. Slowly but surely a vast warning network is being built up. It won't stop atomic bombs, but it certainly will make their deposition a lot harder for an attacker!

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CANCER'S CAUSE . . . ?

★ By PETE BOGG ★

NOT ALL great advances in the scientific world are made in laboratories or in research institutions. Many times it is the pure theorist who comes up with the idea that knocks science for a loop. Relativity came forth in that fashion and many other scientific events were preceded by pure "thinking".

An extremely powerful tool for making new discoveries, particularly these days when the world is overwhelmed in fact, fact, fact and still more fact, is the science of statistics. By merely studying records of phenomena, it is often possible to discover a correlation which gives the clue to finding the answer to a problem.

The enormous incidence of cancer has put into motion vast amounts of scientific research—and yet, from it all, very little, if anything has been learned. But statisticians, playing around with accurate records of cancer patients have made some salient observations which may lead somewhere.

First, the rise of cancer seems to correspond with the vast increase in smoking. There is a correlation between lung cancer and smoking. Two, inhaling doesn't make any difference according to the statistics. Three, the only chemical contained in tobacco which could conceivably cause cancer is the small amount of arsenic left in it from the spraying of the leaf.

There you have a body of facts. They prove nothing by themselves. Yet, they indicate certain possibilities which must be explored further. It is too early to say that smoking is the cause of lung cancer. Statistical study isn't capable of answering so abruptly. Now it is up to the laboratory and its system of controls to find the real relationship.

Nevertheless, the statistical approach has at least given technicians something which they can come to grips with instead of merely stumbling around in the dark through blind, bumbling chance. . .

NEPTUNIAN NEMESIS

★ By MAX LONG ★

THE "NEPTUNIAN NEMESIS" doesn't refer to the planet. With the world poised on the brink of a possible cataclysmic war, the military and naval authorities are wracking their brains to find an answer to the "snorkel", that simple gadget which changed the hunted into the hunter. It's a familiar story, but it bears repeating.

The last war saw the Germans use the submarine with deadly effectiveness, almost, in nineteen forty-two and three, cutting the life-line between America and England. But the lab boys came up with their Goldbergian gadgets which toward the end of the war definitely put the kibosh on the sub. In the last few months of the war the Germans came up with a new wrinkle, the snorkel, which they'd captured from the Dutch and improved upon, and once again came within an ace of doing us in—an eventuality only forestalled by our winning the land and air war and thus putting them out of commission.

The snorkel simply permits the sub to remain submerged indefinitely, taking in air and exhaling exhaust through pipes paralleling the periscope and offering to the searcher a two-foot, almost invisible spot on the vast surface of the sea. The Soviets have taken over the snorkel and are producing subs as fast as tin-cans. The Allied high commands know this and are beating their brains out to combat it.

Sonic and super-sonic gadgets, radar, and other secret gadgetry is pouring from the labs. Special hunting teams of aircraft, blimps and surface ships are loaded with this electronic wizardry. But the odds are still with the sub. Try and find a two-foot dot in thousands of square miles of water, a dot which may disappear in a trice! It's tough to do.

If there is one phase of the modern military strategic idea that has become push-button warfare, this sub-hunting and killing is it. The men trained for the work are practically scientists. Actually abstruse mathematical probability methods are used in hunting subs. The complex electronic equipment is out of this world.

We picture an encounter—hypothetical let us hope—like this:

A sub nails a tanker. The death-cry is picked up by a Navy station. In five minutes the patrol-killers have left the field and are heading out for the victim's grave. Meanwhile aboard the planes contact with ships of the patrol is maintained. Radar and sonar are sweeping the ocean and calculations are nailing probable sub escape paths.

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There is a faint ping in a head-phone. A pip shows on radar—then vanishes. Maybe this is it! Just let them get a glimpse of the sub—surfaced or even with only its snorkel out—and it's good-bye sub! But let the sub stay down and only the surface boys can hope to bang it in with ash-cans.

A screaming light bomber catches a radar-pip. It dives, seaward at six hundred miles an hour. Its nose bursts into a brilliant beam of light as a huge searchlight goes on sweeping the sea beneath with a million candlepower beam. And at the last instant the spot shows! Rockets and ordnance yet unknown blasts seaward and the sub, shattered pokes its nose vertically in a farewell gesture as it goes into its grave.

If they all end that way, okay. But the brain-boys on both sides are competing. It's Buck Rogers all the way...

BEATING THE BOMB!

★ By CAL WEBB ★

WITH THE release of *The Effects Of Atomic Weapons*, the Atomic Energy Commission has at last done a great public service, one which it should have done before. Whether we like it or not, the threat and fear of atomic bombing lies over our heads. Until this authentic, carefully thought-out piece was released, there was no positive information on how to react to the bombing. With the paper however all the data are there. We don't feel like helpless guinea pigs any longer. Knowledge is power—and we've got it.

To appreciate the value of this new and valuable contribution to defense, you have only to notice how avidly and enthusiastically the representatives of the larger cities have seized it. For that matter any industrial areas have shown great interest. Numerous campaigns have been planned in which mock bombing raids will be imagined, and suitable defensive measure taken against them. *The Effect of Atomic Weapons* is a valuable treatise which every American should examine completely or in part.

It says some obvious things: it does not attempt to frighten anyone; nor does it minimize the danger of the atomic bomb. But above all it suggests that one needn't contemplate an atomic bombing with complete hopelessness. It is possible to do something to aid in saving one's life.

The treatise begins with the assumption that if you're within a certain range of the bomb (depending upon its size and what altitude it is exploded at) you're practically a dead duck—either from the physical heat and blast or the direct radiation or the rain of stone, steel and glass from the destroyed buildings. It implies that in a densely populated section, this death area may include between fifty and a hundred thousand persons!

There is a secondary area, within a radius of a mile or more where the radiation burns are likely to be very severe too. Victims within this range will undoubtedly require complex medical care. But outside this lethal area there is a very good chance of staying alive. You are cautioned that at the first sight or sound of an explosion to follow the time-honored practice of falling flat on your face on the ground preferably behind a brick or stone wall or in a pit if possible, and to remain there until the explosion has ceased. Following such orders tends to minimize your exposure to radiation.

The long-range effects of the bomb are of course primarily radiation burns and the touch of radioactive matter dispersed by the exploding bomb. Soap and water baths, in uncontaminated water will do a lot toward removing any lodged particles of this lethal nature. From then on only careful medical analysis can disclose whether or not you have suffered severely. Radiation exposure manifests itself in due time by sickness, hair falling out, nausea, red skin and other obvious symptoms—but only after a time.

It would be desirable to have a small Geiger counter or other radiation detector to indicate the intensity of the after radiation within your area so that you can get out—but fast. Undoubtedly the government will make large quantities of these devices available within a relatively short time.

As chilling as the prospect of being bombed is, it can be faced with calmness and courage. Intelligent evaluation of the situation the clue to survival. Panic is probably our worst enemy. With such tremendous casualties possible everything must be done to make people retain their sense of proportion. With an observation of that fact, the majority of persons stand an excellent chance of coming through an atomic bombing, if not unscathed, at least not killed by fear.

As dreadful as the atomic bomb is, it is man-made, man-conceived, and can be man-fought. The experience of the Japanese at Hiroshima and Nagasaki show that while an unprepared city can be overwhelmed and have its defense borne down by sheer staturation, a prepared city can certainly do a great deal to minimize death and injury. *The Effects of Atomic Weapons* certainly gives us hope for survival ...meager, though it is...

★ ★ ★

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READER'S PAGE

A WEIRD STORY OR TWO

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Ask Naomi, what is her idea of a story just for women? Maybe have a girl as the main character? Get into all the troubles and be the hero, etc.? This would be a novelty. Say, why didn't somebody think of this before? It's a great idea, but please, don't keep it just to the females. Don't you think we males might be interested, too?

About this weird stuff...I don't particularly care for weird stories, but if there's enough demand for them, why don't you print them? I surely wouldn't mind seeing a weird story in FA once in awhile, provided that is, that you don't do away with everything else.

Gerald Hibbs
Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Ok, Gerald, I guess we've had enough letters (including those we haven't been able to print) to give the more so-called "weird" yarns a place now and then in FA. We'll be keeping our eyes open for some suitable material—and all you weird writers, now's the time to send your best yarn in to us!.....wlh

WE LIKE COMPETITION!

Dear Bill:

They tell me penned letters never get printed, but they can't hang me for trying. First, I'm afraid I have to start off on a sour note. In the Oct. ish it was "The Masters of Sleep". In the Nov. ish it's "Mistress of the Djinn". What is this anyway? There seems to be a run of the things. I can't say I liked either story. Oh well, maybe next ish. (Hmmm?)

I liked all the shorts, which is unusual. (Very!) My favorite short in this ish was the one by DeVet. I really enjoyed it.

The Reader's Column: Morton D. Paley— One dozen roses to you Mort, for suggesting the originals. And to FA for accepting.

Brian McNaughton— Sorry, Brian, can't agree with you when you say all the "old" stf. is buried. How about "Exile of the Skies"? It was copyrighted in 1933 but it's as good as ever. You may not think 1933 is old but consider for a moment what science has done in the last ten years. Although I have cited but one example, I'm sure there are many others.

Mrs. Betty Faulkner: If you wonder why Messrs. McNaughton, Silverberg and Ganley get their letters printed often, it's because they have something to say. They say it so it will be interesting to the people who read it, as well as having a good foundation. No offense or anything Betty, huh?

Now back to you, ed. Let me say that I think you are breaking the ice about competitors' names being printed I mean. The only other mag I believe has done this is Ray Palmer over at OTHER WORLDS. It's one large point in your favor.

Why can't there be a department in FA like Rog's in AS? It would make FA much more readable. (Wait Not The Wastebasket, it's readable now, too.) My vote for the best letter goes to Morton D. even if he didn't answer my letter.

Jan Romanoff
26601 S. Western
Lomita, California

Your remark about breaking the ice on mentioning competition is quite interesting, Jan. Actually, we've never deliberately refrained from mentioning competitive magazines. The occasion just never arose to mention any of them. But now that you've brought the subject up we'll admit that we personally follow most of our competitors—to sort of keep us on our toes and try and give our readers an always finer yarn whenever possible. Along these lines we're not backward about patting Ray Palmer on the back for a fine job with his two science-fantasy magazines, IMAGINATION and OTHER WORLDS. We'll even go so far as to say he's printed a number of stories that we would have liked to have published in FA. One of them, in IMAGINATION, was WIND IN HER HAIR by talented Kris Neville. And of course, we always read Tony Boucher's MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Tony has been offering his readers some mighty fine yarns, and we're glad to have him in the field with us.
But as to FA (of which we are justly proud) all we can say is that you'll note that Ray Palmer uses our pages to advertise his IMAGINATION! We'll be smug and say he's following the leader. But we do hope the ad space he's been occupying

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in AS and FA has helped boost his fine little magazine.

As to your suggestion for a department in FA on the lines of the CLUB HOUSE, it's not a bad idea. We'll see what can be done in the near future.....wlh

WE SLIPPED UP

Dear Editor,

Maybe I'm crazy, but I could swear that the covers on the November AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES were both by Arnold Kohn, not Robert Gibson Jones, as it says on the contents pages. Are your typesetters so used to putting Jones' name there that they do it from habit?

In those two issues, I've read only the Mack Reynolds' stories and "The Day the Bomb Fell". In the latter, I noticed an important flaw in the author's science. He has his protagonist walking around for hours after the bomb fell, with an itching skin the only effect of the bomb.

If the bomb was an atomic bomb, as incidents in the story seem to testify, inside of five minutes that boy would be dead, kaput.

I vote for Phyllis Poore as having written the best letter this issue. She has a point there. If a kid can discuss stfantasy intelligently, why should we try to stop him (or her)?

AMAZING is now back to 162 page size, I see. And FA is down to 130. I hear AMAZING won't go slick. The Korean situation, you know. Phooey on Stalin! Phooey on Molotov! Phooey on Malik! Phooey! Phooey! Phooey!

As fr a Ziff-Davis version of Unknown Worlds, how about FA? FA prints good fantasy novels: "The Dreaming Jewels", "The Shades of Toffee", "You're All Alone", "The Devil With You", and so on. This issue's "Mistress of the Djiin", and last month's "Masters of Sleep"—I haven't read, though I hear it's so laden with plugs for Dianetics, it's corny. It was a sequel to an Unknown Worlds story. And, of course, there's Lester del Rey's novel coming up. Is Geier's novel a fantasy? I hope so. I'm reading his "Hidden City" now, and believe me, it's terrific!

On that weird mag, I'm in favor of it.

Get Finlay and Bok and Cartier! Also Hamilton, Sturgeon, and Eric Frank Russell. How about a far future novel by Arthur C. Clarke for AMAZING?

Well, that's all this session.

Terry Carr
134 Cambridge St.
San Francisco 12, Cal.

We bow our editorial heads in shame. You really can tell an artist's style, Terry. Both of the November covers were done by Arnold Kohn, and not Bob Jones. We made an error in the credit line, and would like to take this opportunity to give credit where it is due.

Don't give up hope on the slick AS. It's not dropped, simply shelved until the international situation clarifies. As to FA and Unknown Worlds, you'll be seeing a lot of the type of story Unknown featured in your favorite magazine. Your approval (all of you readers) for the most part on the novels we've been featuring is proof enough that you like the real action fantasy story. And what's more, the writers enjoy turning them out!.....wlh

BAD—FAIR—GOOD!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Gee, first we teen-agers were taking over the letter column of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, but 'tis now the fem fen who are doing so. What next?

I won't gripe, though. Guess the fem fen are teen-agers anyway. In that case, things are hunky-dory.

Your lead story this time, "Mistress of the Djinn", was rotten. Or rather, the first twenty-five pages were rotten. Then the story perked up and was actually readable. In fact it was quite good. I had expected a classic, though because St. Reynard's "The Usurpers", of a few issues ago, was so superb. By the way, when are we going to get a sequel to TU? It's certainly wide open for one.

The other stories, with the exception of one, were nice. I especially liked that of Charles DeVet. That argument between the mutant and the aliens was quiet intelligent. Let's see some more stories by DeVet soon, huh?

Mack Reynolds' story was also good because it was rather unusual. If he'd cared to bring in some sub-plots and had expanded the main one a bit, the story would have been a grand novel or long novelette. Try to get Mack to do a novel. That would be swell!

There are two kinds of novels I'd like to see in FA: Long humorous fantasy such as "The Devil With You" and "Shades of Toffee" and some "cave man" stuff. I realize that the latter type of writing is as old as everything, but I still like it and can't help doing so. So pleeze publish some.

The cover on this November issue was grand. 'Tis when I see a cover like this that I tell myself I like Jones. I'm glad to see that, once in a while, FA can get away from the commercialization that is slowly ruining lots of mags in the opinion of the majority of fen. Keep up the good work.

But, just so ya won't think I'm trying to flatter you, let me say this. The interior illustrations literally stink!

And, just so ya won't be mad at me, I think it's grand of you to take a fan's suggestion and offer illos to the writer of the best letter. My vote this time goes to Phyllis Poore.

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Thanks again for taking Mort's suggestion.

Tom Covington
315 Dawson St.
Wilmington, N. C.

You had us worried for a moment, Tom. At any rate, we're glad you really liked St. Reynard's novel. We thought Geoff did a nice job on it. As to a sequel to "The Usurpers", we'd like to get a few—heck, a lot more opinions on the subject. We don't like to force sequels on a reader, we'd much rather have you fans ask for them!... As to our artwork, we disagree violently with you. You'll never find any better illustrations than those done by Henry Sharp for the lead story in the November FA. As a matter of fact, Sharp illustrated the bulk of that particular issue, and it was—and is—a honey of a job. So there!.....wlh

ONLY TWELVE ISSUES A YEAR!

Dear Editor:

The novel MASTERS OF SLEEP was the best story I have read in a long time. More and more stories like that should be printed. Once I picked up the October issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES it was impossible to lay it down.

VALIANT IS THE WORD was the second best story followed by LEST YE BE JUDGED; then GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE and last, THE HANDYMAN, which was really lousy.

The short articles of unusual things are interesting too. Only one trouble though—only 12 issues a year. But three cheers for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

H. B. Hopkins
210 Welcome Ave.
Norwood, Pa.

So you'd like to see us come out twice a month—or maybe weekly? Well, now, that's something to think about! Confidentially, we'd like to come out oftener too, but right now a monthly schedule seems about the best we can offer. But that isn't too bad, is it?.....whl

INFIDEL (?)

Greetings:

Haven't gone through all of the current issue as yet, but gimme time and I shall—however, there is one thing which caught the eye—in introducing MISTRESS OF THE DJINN it is written: When the Third Crusade smashed into the Holy Land, the real enemy was not the Infidel, but the weird magic of the djinn. (end quote)

H-mmm-mmmm! Are we getting things twisted? Were not the invading Crusaders the ones who were the Infidels? The Moslems were the ones who termed the Christians the Faithless Ones, the "gaiours", too—let it not be said that Islam was faithless or had strayed from the path of faith—'twas the reverse, according to Islam—.

The writer of the sub-heading must have been under the influence of the djinn, only it might have been Gordon's.

To go into the reasons why the Moslems called the Christians the Infidels would involve a lot of theosophic or theologic discussion, and that's too much work at the moment—but the Moslems were not the Infidels.

As it is said in other lands, Allahaismarlidik.

Ed Noble, Jr.
Box 49
Girard, Pennsylvania

Sorry we have to disagree with you, Ed. The use of the word Infidel was correct. If you will look up the word in the dictionary, (we have Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition before us right now) you will note the following: Infidel: 1. Not holding the faith; esp., non-Christian; also opposing, or unfaithful to Christianity. A non Christian; one who does not accept Christianity. b. A non-Mohammedan.

As you can see the accepted, or first, definition is in the manner we employed the word. So the sub-head was accurate. As to Allahaismarlidik?—huh?.....wlh

TEEN-AGE FAN CLUB

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Would you announce the formation of THE GALILEAN SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY—no members over 18. Those interested please contact: Dennis Lynch, 2834 Carlaris Road, San Marino 9, California.

Thank you.

Dennis Lynch
2834 Carlaris Rd.
San Marino 9, Cal.

There you are, Dennis.....wlh

NOW IF I WROTE THIS MONTH...

Dear Mr. Hamling,

I don't think I'll write a letter this month. I'm too lazy to make the effort. But if I *did* write, I think the letter would begin thus thrillingly, with the immortal words of Major Hoople:

EGAD, MAN! What a story! "The Mistress of the Djinn", I mean. It out-Burroughses Burroughs, and comes very near to equalling the work of Robert E. Howard. The battle scenes especially caught my fancy, for no matter how I try to lose myself in enthralling tales of ESP, faster-than-light spaceships or galactic wars, always I return to the good old blood and thunder (and there was plenty of the

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former, at least, in St. Reynard's story) fantasy. If you have any more tales like that lurking somewhere, maybe in an old cast-off coffin, drag 'em out!

Now if I were going to write you this month—although I do not even contemplate such a thing, you understand—I would decry the short length of the novel, which should have been at least 12,000 words longer, and would vociferously demand a sequel. Also, I would praise the illustrations, which are quite the best FA has featured in (too) many issues.

All four stories were above average and it would be difficult to pick any one that was better than the others. Mack Reynolds' neat offering was just that—neat. Neither too short nor too long and with an amusing twist to the ending. "I Take This Earthman" was a strange tale, in more ways than one. There were enough ideas in its 7,000 words to fill three times that length. The stimulant-essence and its ramificationns are worth at least 10,000 words by themselves; the plight of the Liieans and their strange evolution could take up another short story; and the super-intellect defeating the alien invasion might make still another story. "The Dreaming Trees" and "One Way...." had no especially outstanding characteristics, but were—very—readable.

"Rocketship X-M" was too technically inaccurate to be really good, what with meteors coming in clusters of three and producing sound in the vacuum of space, "free fall" affecting small objects only, and not the humans, etc; but anyway it was a step in the right direction. And "Destination Moon" is a hundred-yard dash. *There* is a *real* sf movie!

Ah! (I would say in my hypothetical letter.) Best letter awards, yet. My vote naturally goes to m' good friend Paul Ganley, who expresses perfectly all the praise I wanted to heap upon Leiber and his novel, but had not the words to do.

If I were to write you this month, I would run out of things to say at this point. So I would say, "Long live FA, and may the mag keep up its ultra-high 1950 standards for years to come!" and would then sign my name, thus:

Bob Briney
561 W. Western Ave.
Muskegon, Michigan

Now if we were to sit down and write a reply to the letter you might have written, we might have had some interesting things to say. But of course, since you didn't really write us a letter we'd only get lost in a semantic realm of speculation on what we should say. So we won't attempt a reply to the letter you maybe would have written—except to say, thanks! .....wlh

A PHONY, HE SAYS?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The November FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is all around good. The first story "Mistress of the Djinn" by Geoff St. Reynard (a verse phoney-sounding name) is a nifty; fast-moving, holds one's interest all the way through. However, if you got any *more* djinn stories *I* wouldn't mind if you put them back in the bottle or jug for awhile. I've had enough djinns for some time, or even longer. Plenty keen, all those Sharp illos for that story, too. When it comes out in book form it won't have the same or as good illos, I bet. Why is that? If I could draw as good as that Sharp guy I would be so stuck-up and pleased with myself that I would go around not speaking to nobody. Of course, though, it goes without saying, that there is only one Virgil Finlay. How about reviving that department telling what some of the writers and authors look like, huh? and start with V. F.

You know what? FANTASTIC ADVENTURES *looks better* with 130 pages than with 162—the proportion of the width of the spine to the width of the cover being more pleasing to the eye.

Robert Jones' cover is in general excellent, but he shouldn't let those cameras kid him. An artist must see life as it is and then draw it as it should be. For instance, the girl's right hand is not good, her left arm is "too high", the King's left hand is "too big". Aside from that she has all her clothes on. But *that* will please the old fuddy-duddies who resent youth and beauty and the young fuddy-duddies who are afraid of it.

Of the short stories I like the "beer" one the best. How good can FANTASTIC ADVENTURES get?! I can see you're on the ball, as the saying is, or in the groove, or something. But (I'm full of buts, ain't I?) did you ever take a good look at your crummy "pulp magazine" ads. Am I a drunkard? No. Am I bald? No. Do my false teeth rattle? No. Don't need any. Do I want to buy some pornographic reading matter? No. Have I got the tobacco habit, do I smoke Moron's Delight Cigarettes, or suck on Stinkeroo Seegers, or fumigate the premises with Ruberoid Pipe Tobacco? No. I'm not perfect, I suppose, but I *have* got control of my appetites, as has any one who is not a dam fool.

I know the ads are not *your* fault but what's an Editor for if not to be blamed for things?

I see by AMAZING STORIES that the question arises as to whether there is any sense in letting a crackpot vociferous pressure-group of some fifty or sixty professional "science fiction fans" dictate policy to a magazine. Decidely not! Why not go over to the looking glass and remind the Editor of AMAZING STORIES that he has tens of thousands of Readers,

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mature, intelligent people with the intellectual capacity to see that many "impossible" concepts really *are* possible; whereas he has only a mere few hundred "fanatics"—that's all there *are!* To cite a worn-out example: Christ was the "Shaver" of *his* day. "Why, the fool thinks the world is *round!* Haw! Haw! Haw! Cackle! Cackle! Cackle!" Tell the Editor of AMAZING STORIES that the next time they get some stupendous concept to exploit that they should not let a bunch of high school minds scare them off it.

"Well, now we come to the expanded Reader's Page. The best letter? Well, since there wasn't a letter from Ralph the Bailey in it that time, there could hardly be a "best" one, now could there? So leave us say the second best one (by best I suppose you mean "most interesting") was a tie between Morton D. Paley and that Faulkner gal. But let's take it in order: Morton D. Paley—interesting letter. David Travis—young, but no dope. Brian McNaughton—'nother interesting letter. Mrs. Betty Faulkner—tie for best letter.

She says she wrote several letters and they landed in the waste-basket of ye Ed's. Betts, don't you know that gawd himself couldn't get anything printed in this modern world unless it was *typewritten.* That's why you have to read so much tripe from columnists, nonvelists, etc., etc. Any fool with the price of a typewriter is an "author". That machine is 2/3 of his stock-in-trade. The other 1/3 is an abysmal lack of grammatical knowledge, an inability to spell the word "weird" and several thousand other words, and an appalling lack of imagination.

Well, that's Capitalism for you. Not that Communism is any better or even so good—things are tough all over. Also, perhaps the old question arose in the Editor's mind (I hope I don't malign him) "Is a woman human?" Some say yes. Some say no. *I'm* not so sure.

Phyllis Poore: These teen-age children say such cute things! I bet Mr. Blyler would like to turn her over and spank her! (Not that I'm sticking up for him. He practically said I'm a tassel on the "lunatic fringe." Well, he ought to know all about the l.f.) Personally, I've found that a good spanking is very good for dames, especially young dames. Even if they are behaving themselves it reminds them to keep on behaving themselves, so it is not wasted.

Nancy Moore: Nancy likes BEMS. She should see my pal J.C.! When real bems see him they run away shrieking. Nice guy, but he looks like my Uncle Mortimer.

Donald Smith: He's read FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for one year and already he's cracking his knuckles.

Ed Robinson: He likes that "You're All Alone" story by Fritz Leiber. Me too.

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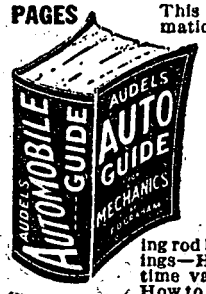

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W. Paul Ganley: Nice letter. A well-informed guy.

Note to gals with a wagon-spoke or rolling pin in the paws: 354 is my mailing address, I don't live there.

Ralph Bailey
354 W. 56th St.
New York 19, N.Y.

We're not quite sure whether you meant that Geoff St. Reynard sounds like a pen-name or just sounds peculiar as a name at all. If you meant that it is a pen-name, you're right. We thought we had more than made it clear in past issues that Geoff St. Reynard is a pen-name for Robert W. Krepps, who does a list of serious novels under the Rinheart imprint. (Nope, Bob doesn't pay for these plugs, we just happen to think he's a terrific writer and want everybody to know about him.)
Ok, you won't have any more djinn stories for awhile. But really, you only had two of them. Is that an overdose? Your comments on the new size of FA is quite interesting. We were somewhat chagrined with the necessity of having to cut the pages—due to circumstances beyond our editorial control—but we're pleased that you think the magazine is still a neat package. As to the ads, we don't write them, nor do we insert them. You can only blame us for the stories and artwork, and gosh, sometimes that's enough of a headache! .....wlh

THE END OF THE READER'S PAGE

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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, Howard Browne, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Managing editor, William L. Hamling, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Business manager, G. E. Carney, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

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G. E. CARNEY,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1950.

[SEAL] Bernice Batkin Fusch,
Notary Public.

(My commission expires November 4, 1952.)

FABLES FROM THE FUTURE

★ By LEE OWENS ★

LEARNING AND FEEDBACK...

ONE OF the great contributions that scientists have made to the study of the human mind, is the recognition of the similarity between the mechanical process of what is called "feedback" and the human process of "learning". The development of computing machines has had a lot to do with this and Dr. Norbert Wiener has been in the forefront of the theoretical advances.

In a human being the process of learning is dependant upon past experience and memory, the storage somehow in our minds, of experiences which we have had. These experiences modify our future behavior. A child, for example may have learned something by the conditioned reflex so favored by the psychologists. It does not touch the stove because once in its past experience it did so, with painful results. It has been conditioned then not to touch the stove for fear of repeating the painful process. The sight of the stove has acted as a trigger to govern its behavior. The child's past experience thus has influenced decidedly, its future behavior.

To all phases of the learning process, the control of future behavior by past experiences, seems to be applicable, not necessarily by conditioned reflexes, but by even more subtle motivations. I wish to pick up a book. I will this desire and my hand reaches out and picks up the book. I have no conscious control over the individual muscles doing the job, but the book nevertheless is picked up smoothly and easily. In the make-up of my nervous system there is some sort of controlling element which moves my arm out and the link between eye, brain and arm muscles completes the act. When the arm moves out in a sweeping gesture toward the book, the amount of distance by which it is away from the book governs the direction and rate and strength with which the arm proceeds toward the book. This complicated array of motions and thoughts is strongly analogous to what the "cybernetics" (thinking machine and control experts) call "feedback".

Feedback is, beautifully and clearly defined by Wiener and the definition applies equally well to machines or to men. He says: "Feedback is the control of a system by reinserting into the system, the results

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of its performance." In a nutshell, that is it.

Consider a simple automatic control cycle like that of an automatic house-heating system. The temperature of the house depends upon the amount of heat put out by the gas furnace, but the amount of heat put out by the gas furnace depends upon the signal sent to it by the thermostat which in turn depends upon the temperature of the room! This is an excellent example of a closed feedback system. The system is perfectly controlled by feeding back into it, data from its performance. The furnace's activity is modified by the thermostat. The furnace is controlled in its behavior by the amount of heat it puts out.

This is not abstract academic reasoning. This is observable controllable fact which is in the process of creating within industry a revolution in automaticity about which this magazine has talked often enough. Through feedback the ability of a machine to modify its behavior in terms of its performance, promises to change the world. Already it is doing so with automatic computing machines, automatic factory processes etc.

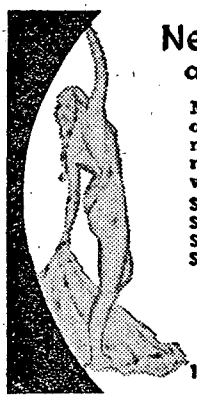
A unique idea pointed out by Wiener, is already taking hold in communications. Phillips, the Dutch electronics and communications firm has come up with a marvelous modification of the telephone system which will undoubtedly be made world-wide shortly.

The conventional telephone system, marvelous though it is, is inefficient. As a rule, you have a limited number of people. with whom you speak frequently over the phone, and a lesser number with whom you speak only occasionally. Yet the phone system has equal amounts of switching equipment to handle both types of calls. Is it possible to construct a phone system which will take cognizance of the fact that you use certain channels more than others and so apportion the services to you? The answer is not only yes; the problem has been solved and the engineers have designed a system which recognizes this fact!

This again is a case of "feedback" with the performance of the phone system modifying the control of the system.

It is at once clear that the principle of feedback and control is all-pervading. It is also clear that this feedback bears a remarkable resemblance to conventional "learning". This very fact is what makes it possible to study and recognize the similarities between machines and humans.

The ant-world is analogous to a limited machine system operating by means of rigid controls. The Fascist and Communist systems which have plagued and are plaguing our modern world are strongly comparable. On the other hand, the feedback learning system is analogous to our democratic process, with learning modifying everything. Is there any doubt which is the better system and which will tri-



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umph in the end?

The ultimate result of these thoughts is that all things on Earth are incontrovertably linked with each, no matter how distant and remote they seem. Even a study of the organic world along with the physical world seems to show that the free, democratic system is a fundamental principle in the advance of Nature...

* * *

THE DEADLY "LARK"

IT'S NO secret that guided missiles are out of the drawing board stage. In fact they're even out of the experimental stage! They've got them now so that they can actually knock down aircraft. Consider that deadly missile named so innocently, "the Lark..." Incidentally naming deadly things for harmless creatures seems to be a penchant with guided missiles experts (the Germans called one guided missile of theirs, "the Butterfly...").

The Lark is a streamlined cylinder about fifteen feet long and a foot and a half in diameter. From both its middle and its tail sprout four stubby rectangular wings at right angles to each other. It looks like a harmless graceful tube. But in its nose is a deadly war-head and its tail houses a reaction rocket motor using aniline and fuming nitric acid! The fules are pumped together in the reaction chamber and whoosh!—the baby takes off in a hurry!

The Armed Forces won't talk about its controlling system, but it certainly must employ certain definite principles. Hermann Oberth has discussed similar ones. Either it has some sensing system like a built in homing radar system which guides it to the target by reflection. Or it may use a heat-following system of infra-red. Or it may use a ground radar guiding system. Whatever the method, the techniques are out of the experimental stage. They can bring bombers down!

And that is the purpose of the Lark. Undoubtedly any enemy raiders attacking our cities will have a certain proportion of atom-bomb carrying ships which will break through our first and second lines of fighter defenses. We simply can't hope to knock all of them down. Pure chance will allow a certain number to get through.

And that's where the Lark steps in. The minute the spotters and radar detectors get news of enemy aircraft and pin point them, Larks will be thrown into the air. Mercilessly and relentlessly accurate, they will home on the bombers at terrific speeds—speeds so great the enemy gunners won't even be able to see them much less track them with their defensive guns. Then blooey!—the bomber is knocked from the skies!

The Lark is only one of a number of such guided missiles. Even as this goes to press it may be obsolete in many respects

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Guided missile technology changes so rapidly from one day to the next and technical innovations are so great, that it is almost impossible to standardize new weapons. Regardless of this fact, the Lark, or a reasonable facsimile thereof will be in the sky should raiders ever appear above our cities!

★ ★ ★

SHANGHAIED INTO SPACE!

I HAVE to laugh when I hear you talking about how tough a spaceman's life is. You lads don't know what toughness is. Man and boy, for fifty years I've rocketed through the system and I can tell you some tales that'll make your blood run cold. Fifty years ago when I first went into deep-space as a lad fresh out of engineering school, there was no atomic drive. Chemical rockets—flimsy tin-cans, we called 'em—shot us through the System. Accidents and deaths were so frequent that you couldn't get men with engineering qualifications to ship aboard them—and you had to have technical men. And when piracy and gangsterism were rife with the opening of the Martian uranium mines, you had to shanghai a crew. I remember because I was shanghaied and that was an experience I'll never forget.

I can still see the old bar on Crawford Street. It was a dingy hole, only a few blocks from White Sands Field and Goddard Place. A half dozen of us had graduated that day and had decided to make the rounds for a roaring time before the ceremonies the next day. Naturally we had too much to drink—we were loaded to the ears. I was sitting at a table in the corner, I remember talking with a fascinating blonde witch. She was drinking with me—and seemingly keeping up. A half dozen men in a group came into the bar. They were black uniformed and husky.

I mumbled something about "looking like policemen." The blonde gave me a knowing wink. "Don't worry about 'em, honey," she said in liquid tones, "they won't bother us."

We had another drink and everything began to get hazy. At the moment I thought I'd just had too much to drink and was passing out normally. I was even happy about it. I had a foolish vacuous grin on my face and I even patted the pocket where I'd stuck my certificate showing my degree. Then everything went black. I'd blanked out.

When I came to, it was in a small metallic room. There was a steady roaring, hissing sound, and over the dullness in my mind and the bad taste in my mouth, I knew almost instantly where I was. I came alert in a hurry. I'd been shanghaied aboard a rocket!

I pounded with futile rage against the cubicle's door. I shouted and yelled. The door suddenly opened and a black bearded face met mine.

"Shut up," the face growled, "or I'll

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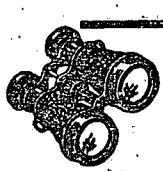

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smash your head in, sonny." The black clad figure of the spaceman brandished a wooden club in my face. I shut up. I was tired, hung-over, weak,—and scared.

They let me in the room for what seemed to be an eternity. By that time I'd come to my senses. I wanted out—but I knew there was nothing I could do. The same man who'd quieted me so effectively appeared again.

"O.K. punk," he said. "Come along with me. The captain wants to see you."

He followed me through the small metal corridors—almost tubes they were—in the cramped interior of the space craft. When we reached the navigation room, I saw two other young men. Like me they looked beaten.

The captain was instantly recognizable. He looked us up and down with no trace of amusement at our bedraggled appearance.

"You men should know you're aboard the *Ceres II*," he said calmly. "You're signed as navigator—" he pointed a finger at one, "and you're engine gang—and you're—" this was me, "—assistant to Scotty on the engines."

Simultaneously we opened our mouths to protest.

"Shut up," he said jabbing a finger at us. "Use your heads. You've been pressed aboard, I'll admit. There's nothing you can do about it. If you raise hell and refuse to cooperate and learn, I'll dump you at the first Jovian port where you'll rot. They sympathize with spacemen—in space ports away from Terra. If you do, on the other hand, play it sensibly and cooperate with me, you'll learn a hell of a lot, and when you return to Terra you'll have full-fledged engineering and rocket tickets. Now which way's it going to be?"

I had to admire the man's directness. And I realized my own position. I'd planned to go into Rocket Chemicals Ltd. on graduation. Instead I was in deep space. I shrugged.

"We're trapped, Captain," I said, "but I'll go along." The others nodded, agreed too. We had to. What else could we do.

When we got together later we talked about how we'd raise hell with the consul at that Jovian port—but gradually we came to accept our lot. The work was so interesting, that we made the adjustment with no trouble at all.

And that was the beginning. Ever since, I've spent most of my time as rocket officer aboard a space-can. I've been through the system a hundred times and you can't name the planet, satellite, asteroid or what have you that I haven't seen. I've been pirated, shanghaied (as I've told) wrecked on Mercury, beaten-up in half a dozen ports, fought in a dozen bitter battles, lost in a space suit off Phobos—you name it, I've done.

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